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THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION



THE  
BOOK OF THE REVELATION

BY THE REV.  
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"EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE—BIBLE TRUTH," ETC.



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TO THE  
REVERED MEMORY  
OF  
THOMAS ANDERSON  
MY FIRST TEACHER.





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## WHAT IS AN APOCALYPSE?

### Rev. i. 1-8

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass : and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John ; who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein ; for the time is at hand (R.V.).*

THE name by which this book would be known to its earliest readers among the Christians of Asia Minor would be "the Apocalypse," or "the Apocalypse of John." This is the name which it bears in the original Greek, not only in the "title," which is later than the book, but in the opening words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ," where "Revelation" is the rendering of the word "Apocalypse." Now, those among its first readers who had been Jews ere they became Christians would be quite familiar with a title such as this ; it would not be the first book bearing this name with which they were ac-

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quainted, and they would be prepared for the character of its contents and the peculiar forms which they take. By the word itself, which exactly corresponds in its etymology to our word "Revelation," they would understand the removing of a veil, the veil which hides the future from the eyes of men. And the period between the close of the Old Testament Canon and the end of the first century after Christ had seen the production of many books which had this purpose and bore this name. The earliest specimen of an Apocalypse—the one which is indeed the prototype of them all—is found within the

× Old Testament itself in the Book of Daniel; but this had been followed by many others, the names of which are less familiar to us than they were to the Jews. There is, for example, the Book of Enoch, of Jewish authorship, and composed at different periods in the second and first centuries before Christ. It was for long regarded by both Jews and Christians as inspired. It is quoted by name in the Epistle of Jude, and

× probably referred to in the opening chapter of the first Epistle of Peter. It consists largely of visions which purport to have been seen by Enoch, "the seventh from Adam," and is written in the first person as though by Enoch himself. There is no doubt, however, that it is the production of a much later age. Then there is



the Assumption of Moses, from which, in all probability, St. Jude derived his allusion to "Michael the archangel contending for the body of Moses." Another book of this class which had wide circulation and great influence in both Jewish and Christian circles is the Fourth Book of Esdras, or Esra, which is more familiar than the others, because it is found in the Apocrypha. Like Enoch, it is quoted by many of the early fathers as a work of genuine inspiration, and it is of special interest to us because it is practically contemporary with the Apocalypse of St. John. It also is a record of many visions, and makes even more abundant use of the symbolism of beasts with many heads and eagles with many wings.

There are still several other Jewish works of this class which might be enumerated; but it is not necessary to do so here, nor yet to describe further the contents of this Apocalyptic literature. Our main purpose is to call attention to its existence, and to the great interest taken in it by many Jews of the first century, and now to indicate briefly the general character of these books in order that we may have an idea of what our Book of Revelation means by calling itself an Apocalypse.

The first thing to observe is the kind of atmosphere, political and religious, in which they

flourish. An Apocalypse is the product of "bad times"—bad times for the Church, the people, and the Kingdom of God. The cause of this condition of affairs is seen to be a double one, external and internal. The external cause is the oppression of the enemy, the fact that, for a time at least, the foes of righteousness have got the upper hand, the people of God are suffering persecution, the present is dark, and the immediate future darker still. Hope, at least for this world, is, humanly speaking, almost at an end. Nothing short of "a new heaven and a new earth" can bring redress and security. And the internal cause is the absence of any "open vision." Apocalyptic is the successor of prophecy: it comes into vogue when, and because, prophecy has ceased. The period following on the close of the Old Testament is full of evidence that men were sadly conscious that it was so with them. There was no longer any one by whom it could be said, "The word of the Lord came to me." And men who desired to find a message of mingled warning and encouragement for their contemporaries, turned to the prophets for their inspiration, and tried to read the future in the light of the principles they laid down. The prophet had been first and foremost an orator, a speaker-forth of the mind of God to men. The Apocalyptist is a writer: he writes in solitude

what another may read in public. He is a seer. He sees the future as it needs must shape itself in accordance with the principles of Divine government, and the attributes of the Divine Being, which have been revealed through the prophets. He is not conscious of personal inspiration such as would enable him to reveal new truth, but acts rather as the interpreter of earlier revelation, showing how it may be applied to his own present or to the immediate future.

This twofold characteristic of the situation out of which the Apocalypses spring, the oppression of God's people and the absence of direct inspiration, leads to the second and most striking feature of all these books, namely, that they transfer the scene of God's manifested glory from the world that now is to a world which is to come, or (giving a slightly different rendering to the word represented by "world") from the present "age" to a future one. In other words, they interpose between their own time and the fulfilment of God's promises a crisis and catastrophe so great that it may be identified with the last judgment, overturning so completely the present constitution of the world, that what follows it is "a new heaven and a new earth." In this we see the greatest distinction between them and the prophets of Israel, who had foretold the fulfilment of God's promises under the con-

ditions of the life that now is. They predicted a golden age for Israel, marked by the restoration of Jerusalem, the return of the captives, and the establishment of an ideal kingdom upon earth in the rule of the Messiah. The glories of this Messianic age were to be largely of a material and earthly kind: they are expressed in terms of earthly prosperity. When the horizon of the life that now is remained so bright, it is little wonder that the Jews before the Exile betray but little interest in the life that is to come. The hope of immortality was at best but dim, partly at least because the need for it was but lightly felt.

The Apocalypses, beginning with Daniel, show a change of profound significance. The keynote of their conception is found in the saying which becomes current after the Exile: "God has made not one world but two, not one age but two ages." That is to say, this world, this age, this dispensation, is to be followed by another, the outward conditions of which will be very different, and the transition from the one to the other is the crisis of judgment. Isaiah looks forward to the establishment of a Messianic kingdom upon earth, where "the cow and the bear shall feed, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and none shall hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain." The transformation is a moral and spiritual one rather than

a physical; and even the "new heavens and the new earth" of this prophet's prediction leaves room for the "sinner of an hundred years old." The Apocalypses, on the other hand, look through and beyond any such tentative realisation of the Messiah's kingdom to an entire reconstitution of the conditions of life. In their "new heaven and new earth" there is "no curse any more," neither any place for the "fearful and the unbelieving." The centre of the prophets' hope is a restored and glorified Sion upon earth: the Apocalyptists interpret these prophecies in what we should call a spiritual sense, and all their gaze is fixed upon the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God "coming down from heaven." Thus, in passing from prophecy to Apocalypse, we pass from the expectation that God's righteousness and glory will be completely vindicated on earth to the expectation that they will be vindicated finally and completely only in heaven.

It would be hard to overestimate the change in human thought and outlook which is here involved; and yet there is a point of view from which these two convictions, apparently so contradictory, are seen to lie side by side, in perfect harmony, and that is the point of view of Jesus. When He declared, "the kingdom of heaven is within you," He revealed a higher truth in

which both the earlier ones find their harmony. He declared in effect that the Kingdom of God is not conditioned either by space or time, that it does not follow the life that now is, as the Apocalyptists thought, but penetrates and permeates it; and on the other hand that it is not exhausted in any earthly manifestation, as the prophets thought it might be, but finds its consummation in the world to come, the life beyond the grave.

A third characteristic which all these Jewish Apocalypses have in common is to our minds a startling, and even a perplexing one. It need not disturb the study of our Apocalypse, which in this matter differs from all the others; but the fact is nevertheless important, that they are all "pseudonymous." That is to say, they bear the name, and are written in the name, of some one who was not their author. The names they bear, such as Enoch, Moses, Isaiah, Baruch, Esra, and so forth, are names of men who were dead and gone many centuries before these works were written. And yet there is no room for any suggestion of fraud or deception practised on the contemporaries of the actual writers. In all probability, it was a well-understood device, adopted for reasons that were equally well understood, reasons partly political and partly religious. To appreciate the point of view from which this



was possible, we require to divest our minds of our modern ideas of literary property. In Hebrew literature there is no trace of any writer regarding his work as in any sense his property or of any benefit accruing to him from its production; nor is there any trace of one writer recognising the writings of another as his property. Men wrote then for altogether different motives from those which have prevailed especially since the invention of printing. They wrote neither for fame nor for profit, but simply to help other men by recording the thoughts which God had given either to themselves or to others. Those who wrote under a strong sense of being commissioned by God to address men, did nothing, indeed, to conceal their own personality. In their case the personality added weight to the message. Others, again, writing without that sense, wrote anonymously, as in the cases of Lamentations, parts of Proverbs, or Jonah. The third class, who belonged to a time when it was a matter of common consciousness that there was no longer any open vision, frankly attached their work to the name of one long ago departed, on the ground that they felt their spirit or their message in harmony with his. So far from being either anomalous or fraudulent in its purpose, this pseudonymous writing was one of the recognised literary methods of the time, and one



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which was followed with an entire absence of any intention to deceive.

We mark this common characteristic of the Jewish Apocalypses, however, rather as a point of contrast with the Apocalypse of John, which is neither anonymous nor pseudonymous, but stamped at more places than one with the name of its author, and that the name of a living man personally known to many of his first readers.

A fourth characteristic of these books is to be noted and carefully borne in mind, and that is the use made by a writer of an Apocalypse of the material provided by his predecessors. This is at once abundant and free. Not only does he quote, and that without indicating where he quotes from, but his method consists largely in quoting with such alterations and modifications as may make the old material serve the needs of a new time. It follows that in many instances the writer's distinctive contribution is to be found rather in the modification which he introduces than in the material which he actually makes use of. The most considerable source from which these later writers draw is undoubtedly the Book of Daniel. In this we meet for the first time many of the symbolic figures and actions which became, as it were, apocalyptic conventions, part of the framework or setting in which, from thenceforth,

Apocalyptic ideas were commonly expressed. Thus, the method of representing the great world-powers under the forms of various living creatures, and their kings as "heads" of a "beast," the introduction of Antichrist or the "abomination of desolation" as part of the "world-process" of the future, and the computation of the duration of his reign by means of cryptic numbers, these are only some of the features which make their earliest appearance in Daniel, to form afterwards part of the material with which the Apocalyptists work.

These, then, are the most important features which mark the Apocalypses as a form of literature. They are also marked by a common purpose. An Apocalypse is a "Tract for Bad Times," intended to encourage God's people suffering under the strain of oppression and persecution. The writer's object is to steel them to patience and endurance unto the end by the presentation in the most vivid form of the fact which overrides all others, "the Lord reigneth," and will surely come with a recompense. The assurance is conveyed by means of a series of pictures of the future, or visions of the real but unseen present. The personality and inspiration of the writer display themselves not in the material which he may have derived from earlier sources, but in the selection he makes, in the adaptation he puts upon it,

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the interpretation of the world's history which clothes itself in these forms.

On two points, however, our Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation, differs from the others with which we are acquainted. First, as we have already observed, it is not pseudonymous. It does not claim to have been written by a great prophet or religious leader of the past, but claims to come from the pen of a contemporary of those to whom it first came. It claims, further, to be written by one John, a disciple of Christ, and a person of acknowledged authority and influence in the Churches of the Roman province of Asia. Very early tradition asserts that this John was no other than John the son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve, the one whom Jesus loved, to whom the Church ascribes also the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. And while no doubt has been ever raised as to the justice of the claim to be written by a contemporary, and by one whose name was John, the tradition that this was John the Apostle has also met with general acceptance; although there are those who would recognise in the author another John, who is distinguished from the Apostle as the "Presbyter" or Elder.\* But inasmuch as he also was one of the circle of our Lord's personal disciples, as-

\* See further on this and other matters above mentioned in the *Century Bible*, Revelation, pp. 13-45.

sociated with Him during His earthly ministry, it does not greatly matter for our present purpose which of the two is to be regarded as the author. In either case he was a Jew, one who had known Jesus according to the flesh, and had companied with Him as He walked and taught among men.

The second point of difference is that this book is written by one who is conscious of being a prophet. He followed the Apocalyptic method in making use of earlier material, but he was not as the other Apocalyptists referred to above, a mere adapter and interpreter of earlier Apocalyptic visions. He was one of the new order of prophets—Christian prophets—who made their appearance after Pentecost, and played a great part in the Church of the first century. He spake, being moved by the Spirit of Christ. But the form into which he threw his utterance was that of an Apocalypse, and we may be prepared to find his work marked by some of the characteristics common to the class.

John records in this book the vision or visions he had seen in Patmos, but he does more. The visions set his prophetic activity in motion. It was probably after he had left the isle of his banishment that he committed to writing what had been given him to see. And as he weaves together his record of that, he weaves in other things the fruit of meditation on his strange

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experience, fragments and echoes of Old Testament prophecy and Apocalypse, and, it may be, fragments of other Apocalypses which were precious in his sight. It is impossible, and it is not necessary, to distinguish what he had actually seen from the thoughts and memories and predictions which he thus wrought into the record of his visions. He had seen a picture or pictures of infinite wonder; he had heard the voice of Christ commanding him to write not only "the things which thou hast seen," but also the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter. He was at once the describer of his vision and its interpreter, delineator of the world as seen by the eye of God, and prophet of the things that must shortly come to pass.

} Under the form of an Apocalypse he spoke as a prophet.

The time seems to have come when we are called upon to give new heed to his message, and to employ the new material which has been accumulating for its just interpretation. For some time past the Apocalypse and the circle of ideas which it represents have suffered from comparative neglect. This is in part due to the uncertainty of its interpretation and the vagaries of its interpreters. In part it is due to our preoccupation with the opposite pole of Christian hope and consciousness, that which may be

called the ethical. The world that now is, and the world that is to be, these are the two *foci* of an ellipse of great orbit, round which the mind of Christendom has travelled several times, held in its place by its relation to both these *foci*, but nearer now to one and now to the other. The mind of the Church has been at one time more clearly conscious of her redemptive mission to society, at another of her native opposition to the world as now constituted. Her attitude over against that world has been now one of hope that the Kingdom of God might come to be realised under present conditions, now one of despair as looking for that realisation only under the conditions of a new heaven and a new earth. There has also been a tendency in those who stood at one point of view, to criticise those who occupied the other, not having reached the higher point where both are seen as one. For it is undeniable that both points of view find recognition in our Scriptures, and may indeed be found in the teaching of our Lord. The one serious mistake we have to learn to avoid is that we should insist on making either of these *foci* the centre round which our life and thought are to turn; and the one secret of harmonious thinking in justice to all we know of God is to recognise that in Christ Jesus the two coincide, that for us in Him they are continuously approximating, and



so the thought and life which revolve round both these points in equal balance *tend* to move in a perfect circle. The ethical and the Apocalyptic elements both have their place in the Christian system; both are necessary factors in redemption.

No wise man will presume to dogmatise on the historical movement in the midst of which he stands; but unless the signs of the times are very deceptive, we are at or near a point where the emphasis which has for fifty years been laid upon the realisation of the kingdom upon earth will make way for a new emphasis to be laid on the transcendental Kingdom of Heaven. We have most of us lived through an era of enthusiasm for social amelioration as the tangible working out of God's will for men. Stimulated by the preaching of F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley, by the preaching and social work of Thomas Chalmers, roused by the pungent satire and inspired by the ideas of Thomas Carlyle, stung by the polished criticism of Matthew Arnold, and less reasonably so by the sneers levelled by George Eliot at other-worldliness, English Christianity during this period came to be penetrated as never before with the conception of the service of man as a duty to God. Attention was concentrated upon the life that now is, on the ethical side of religion, the Sermon on the Mount, and the amelioration of the conditions of existence



for the poor and suffering. The poet of the period was Tennyson with "Locksley Hall," "Maud," and "The Princess"; its statesmen, Bright and Cobden, passionate for the rights of the people and the welfare of the masses; its martyr, Arnold Toynbee, burning himself out in the effort to instil into the rich their obligation to the poor.

The governing idea less or more consciously present to the minds of these men was the Kingdom of God to be established upon earth, for whose realisation men were called upon to strive and pray and suffer. Their attitude to God might be expressed in the words of the disciples on the way to Emmaus: "Wilt thou not at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Wilt Thou not here and now and under the conditions of this present life establish the rule of justice, mercy, and peace? And there was an under-running current of suggestion that if God would not, or did not, manifest His power in this way, if the Church could not on this plane vindicate her claim to be the agent of the Divine redemption, it hardly mattered what God might do or not do under other conditions and in another world.

Now the situation is changed: for good or for evil we find ourselves living in a different moral atmosphere. The mere rehearsal of these mid-Victorian names carries with it the impression that whoever may be the men that influence our

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generation and express its attitude to life, it is not these. Many of the principles which they held to be axiomatic, or demonstrated through their effort, are now dismissed or ignored. Many of the ideals which they assumed as desirable or desired by all are now questioned or scouted. The principles are not the less true; the ideals are not the less noble and ennobling; but those who assert them are not the voices which are heard; what was once a commonplace of public life may now sound as a lonely echo from the desert. Like every partial failure of human aspiration, this change has been due in large measure to one-sidedness, to concentration on one half of the complete ideal, in this case concentration on the Kingdom of God as coming by process only, and under the conditions of the life that now is, and to the ignoring of the other half of truth, the conception of the Kingdom as not of this world, as finding its consummation under conditions of spiritual existence, and after a crisis, a catastrophe, which for the individual is represented by death, and for humanity by the crash of judgment. In other words, through their enthusiasm for the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount men were led to overlook the teaching of Matthew xxiv.; in their devotion to the ethical and practical they forgot the mystical and transcendental elements in the system of Jesus;

they sat at the feet of the prophets, but the Apocalypse was a book of unimportant mysteries.

It is, therefore, by no means accidental or without significance that in the last ten or twenty years there has been a marked revival of interest in the whole subject and literature of Apocalypse. Both the Christian and the Jewish conceptions of the world to come, of judgment, of the reign of God in a new heaven and a new earth, have been investigated with a thoroughness which sheds a new light on this whole area of thought. The pendulum has swung so far in the new direction that at least one competent scholar of the New Testament has advanced the opinion that the real emphasis of our Lord's teaching is to be found less in the ethical standards therein set up for the present than in the Apocalyptic revelation of the future. The time seems to have come, therefore, for making the attempt to expound, with the aid of the new material, the meaning and value of the one Apocalypse contained in our New Testament, in the hope of restoring it, if possible, to its proper place in our private as well as our public Canon of Scripture.

## WHERE THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST CENTURY PUT CHRIST, AND WHY

REV. i. 4-6

*John to the seven churches which are in Asia : Grace to you and peace, from him which is and which was and which is to come ; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne ; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood ; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father ; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen (R.V.).*

WE have learnt in the previous chapter what it means that in the Book of Revelation we have “ words of prophecy ” in the form of an Apocalypse. The writer is one of the new order of Christian prophets, corresponding to those of the Old Testament, but proclaiming the mind and will of God in the name, and in the spirit, of Jesus. To him has been given while “ in the isle that is called Patmos ” a mighty vision of things to come ; and he obeys the injunction to write

down "the things which he has seen," along with "the things which are." In doing so he weaves into his description much that is the fruit of meditation on what he has seen, much that was lying in his memory, handed down from the prophecies of the Old Testament, and possibly some things contained in later Jewish literature with which he must have been familiar from his early days. These things provided to a considerable extent the *forms* into which he threw the description of what he had seen, the colours with which he worked in building up his picture; and the whole took shape as an Apocalypse, one of a well-known and well-defined class of literature, with rules and methods of its own. Just as St. Luke, writing the Acts of the Apostles, wrote history, and St. Paul, writing to Timothy, wrote an Epistle, so St. John wrote an Apocalypse.

Before, however, he comes to the actual vision, the description of the things which he has seen, and the prediction of the things which are to come, he sets before his readers, in vers. 4-6, a wonderful description of the things which are.

"John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is, and who was, and who is to come: and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne: and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our

Verses  
4-6.

Verses  
4-6.

sins by his blood: and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father: to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever."

The form into which this rich and comprehensive statement is thrown is that of an address or salutation to the Churches in Asia Minor with which the Apostle was personally acquainted. To them, in the first place, his message was to be directed, but through them, as a representative group, to the Church as a whole. It is a salutation, passing into a benediction, and that into a doxology.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the interest of this passage in the history of religion. We seem to see here Christian theology in the making. We touch it, and are enabled to observe it, at the point of transition between living experience and formulated doctrine, between the individual and diversified experience of men in contact with Jesus and the collected and connected formulæ of a creed. The Christian faith, when it came to be finally defined, proclaimed a triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and Christian thinkers exhausted the resources of thought and language in the attempt to define their mutual relation. In this passage, though we are far from having reached that stage, it is easy to see that the Apostle traces the grace



and peace which he invokes to a threefold source, and so describes that source as to suggest rather than to define the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. The order in which these are arranged is, of course, remarkable, and probably unique; and even more remarkable is the way in which the Spirit is referred to. In both these points we see tokens of Christian thought at its earliest stage. But what is most important is to observe that we have before us not formulated dogma, but elementary reflection on experience. John and his fellow-believers knew that grace and peace had come to them from God, that grace and peace had come to them through the ministry of the Spirit, and also that grace and peace had come to them by Jesus Christ; and in the prayer that the same benediction may be continued and extended the Apostle appeals to the same threefold source from which he had known it to reach himself. We have, then, as the first element in the apostolic consciousness, experience—experience of “grace and truth coming through Jesus Christ.” This gives him his material. But we see also what it is that gives him the form in which his experience is described. And in this passage, as largely throughout the book, it is the language and the symbolism of the Old Testament. In the striking phrase, “Him which is and which was and which is to come” (still

more striking in the original than it can be made in a translation), there is a direct allusion to the great passage in Exodus where Jehovah reveals himself to Moses as the "I am," the self-existent and eternal one. In the description of the "seven spirits before the throne" the Apostle is drawing on the language of later Judaism, according to which the chiefs of the angelic bands of spirits were seven in number. And when he describes Jesus as "the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth," he is paraphrasing the language of the Psalms so as to make it express what had come under his own observation. But it is Jesus whom he sets there, alongside of God, as part of the threefold source of grace and peace.

This fact deserves our close attention, both in its extraordinary character and in the explanation which it suggests. It is, indeed, very extraordinary that we should find Jesus set where He is set here; and the marvel has only become the greater as through investigation and criticism the situation has been made more clear. To our fathers it seemed only natural that those who had hailed in Jesus the long-expected Messiah should forthwith invest Him with Divine rank and honour. To them the ancient prophecies and hopes concerning the Messiah seemed



to involve nothing less. Had He not, for example, been described by Isaiah as "the Mighty God the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace"? Had not His suffering and subsequent exaltation been foretold with singular minuteness in the famous fifty-third chapter of the same book? Looking back on these things in the light shed on them by the actual manifestation and history of Jesus, they do seem to us to anticipate with strange accuracy both the experience through which He passed and the glory He has received, so that it is difficult to realise that the Jews were not prepared to hail Him as God in man, if they were able to recognise Him at all. And yet it must be remembered that Jesus in His historical manifestation was both less and more than the Messiah looked for by His contemporaries. According to Jewish understanding of these prophecies, even of the greatest of them, they could be, and were to be, fulfilled in the person of a human sovereign, an ideal king over an Israel restored to independence and to power. And in the generations following the close of prophecy this hope waned and revived only to wane again, so that there were periods in Jewish history before Christ when the religious hope of the future hardly included the figure of Messiah at all. And as to His coming to glory through suffering, that prophecy had been so little under-

stood, or had made so little impression, that when Jesus spoke of the Cross that awaited Him, one of the disciples who knew him best "took Him and began to rebuke Him." Whatever it was that led the Church of the first century to set Christ where it did, in the glory of the Father, it was not merely the fact that they believed Him to be the Messiah. It is indeed a great miracle with which we are confronted. Just as Jesus transformed the Cross, which was religiously as well as politically a symbol of shame, into a throne of glory, so He transfigured the idea of the Messiah from that of an earthly deliverer and potentate into that of God in man. And the less predisposition there was in the minds of His contemporaries to such a transfiguration the greater was the marvel which He wrought.

Neither shall we see it in its true light unless we bear in mind another fact which made the transfiguration of the Messianic idea all the more difficult to effect, namely, that these Jews were before all else in their religion monotheists. The thing from which they shrank with deepest horror was offering to any one but Jehovah the honour which was due to Him alone. It was the lesson which had been burnt into their consciousness by the fires of suffering, and annealed by the chill of exile, one

which they never afterwards forgot and never questioned. From the time of the return from Babylon they were rigid monotheists, both in theory and in practice; and yet those who believed in Jesus set Him where they did. The fact is nowhere more conspicuous than in the Book of Revelation. Although the writer is plainly a Jew of Jews, his mind saturated with Hebrew literature and Hebrew modes of thought, a true son of the race with which monotheism had become a passion, and the ascription of Divine honour to any other than the supreme God a horror and a blasphemy, he nevertheless sets Jesus, the man whom he had known in the flesh, side by side with God. Indications are not wanting of the writer's familiarity with the historical Jesus. He frequently makes use of the name which specially marks His human nature; he refers to His death at Jerusalem, to His resurrection, and to His exaltation to the Father's throne. He alludes to the twelve Apostles, and echoes more than one of the recorded sayings of Jesus. But for him the Jesus whom he had known in the flesh is lost in the glory of the exalted Lord. He is "the Lord of lords and King of kings." His existence reaches back before the beginning of things created. Himself the principle from which all creation issues, He is the absolutely Living One, by whom it can be said, as God alone

can say, "I am the first and the last." To Him, therefore, is committed the unfolding of the book of human destiny, the waging of the final conflict with evil, the holding of the Divine assize. All these functions which men had been taught to recognise as absolute prerogatives of the Divine, John lays without explanation upon Christ. And not these only which belong to the future, but also those attributes which had been displayed in earlier revelation as the peculiar property of the Most High are similarly assigned to Jesus Christ. In the vision of the Son of Man which immediately follows this passage, the Apostle takes one after another of those phrases which had been consecrated from old times to the description of the Most High God, those attributes in which by prophet and psalmist He had been apparelled, and applies them to Christ as though they were recognised to be His by right. The description of the "Ancient of Days" in Daniel is transferred to Him. He holds the keys of Hades and of Death. He searches the hearts of men. He shares in the Divine honour paid to God: even angels join in worshipping "God and the Lamb." \*

We cannot but inquire with wonder to what cause or causes this central phenomenon of the Christian consciousness is to be traced. Other causes, and among them prophecy in particular,

\* See *Century Bible*, Introduction, p. 72.

may have contributed ; but the cause which was both primary and efficient was the personality of Jesus, the total impression which He made on those who knew Him best, and their conviction that He had loosed them from their sins and made them kings and priests to God.

On the one hand there was the total impression made by Jesus, His personality and His history. The Apostle, in the description which he here gives, at least suggests the elements which went to make up that impression. In the phrase "faithful witness" there is an echo of His words recorded in the Gospel: "I bear witness to the truth," an allusion to the impression Jesus had made as a teacher, to the self-luminous revelation of which He was the bearer to the world. "First-born from the dead" testifies to the central fact of the disciples' knowledge concerning Him, that though He had been dead, yet He was living, and so to the revolution in their thinking which had been wrought by His resurrection. "Prince of the kings of the earth," a phrase moulded on the Messianic language of the eighty-ninth Psalm, attests the impression Jesus had made of universal dignity and authority, the conviction He had wrought in the minds of His disciples as to the supremacy of that spiritual kingdom of which He was King. These are the elements in His personality and His history here indicated by John

which combined to produce such an impression that the men who believed in Him could do nothing else than equate Him with God.

But there was another line along which they were led to the same conclusion, and that was their experience of what Jesus could do, and had done, for and in those who believed. And as the thought of this rises in the Apostle's mind he passes over from benediction invoked upon his readers to doxology addressed to Christ. Here is what Christ had done for him and for all his brethren: "To him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood." So the true text reads. Some copyist, who was thinking more of grammar than of Christian experience, thought it must be a mistake, and altered it to "loved." Or perhaps John himself first wrote "loved" and then bethought him: "Why should I say 'loved' when He loves us still?" At any rate, there is conviction of the early Church: the Jesus whom they had known not only loved them while He was their companion on the earth, but loves them still, shares therefore in that further quality of the Godhead of which John writes elsewhere: "God is Love," and gives to that quality just what each man requires to find in it, personal direction towards himself. Thus Jesus is the link between the universal God and the individual soul. What without Him would be incredible, not only be-



comes credible but is actually realised through Him. God loves me: I know it by referring myself to the historical Jesus: and when that is so, He has for me the value of God.

But the experience mediated by Jesus does not stop here. He "hath loosed us from our sins," says John. Or, it may have been "washed us from our sins" that he wrote. In either case think what it means that John and those in whose name he wrote had found this to be so, that a guilty past was no longer a barrier between them and God, that they could stand conscience-clear in the presence of the All-Holy One, that they were no longer the slaves of sin and sinful habit, but men of moral stamina, able to resist and overcome temptation. And this they traced to Jesus, not to any ritual they had performed, not to any sacrifice they had offered, not to any moral revolution engineered by themselves, but to what He had done for them in dying, and in them as living again. Along with this their indubitable experience of forgiveness of, and deliverance from, sin, we must take the universal conviction of their time, expressed by certain of the Pharisees in our Lord's lifetime: "Who can forgive sins save God only?" in order to see the full bearing of the fact that these Christians of the first generation knew, felt, and declared that it was through Jesus that this had

happened to them, that they had been loosed from their sins.

But there is still a further point in their experience which goes to explain why they put Jesus where they did. They found themselves in a new relation to the world, and to one another as well as to God. They felt that they were collectively a kingdom, a society distinct from the surrounding world, exalted above it, exercising royal powers over life. They were conscious of living on a higher plane, in another mode of existence penetrated by the powers of the world to come. And they formed also a priesthood. Formerly they had looked up to other men as the appointed and necessary mediators of God's mercy and God's truth. Now they needed such no longer. They had stepped up into their place, conscious of having for themselves immediate access to God, and of offering unto Him a continuous "spiritual service," the daily sacrifice of heart and mind and body, which made any other sacrifice as unnecessary as any other priesthood. And this glorious privilege, this deliverance from the yoke of human priesthood and priestcraft, this royal relation to the world of sense, they traced to Jesus. It was He that had made them "a kingdom and priests to God."

It was this complex and yet harmonious im-



pression which Jesus had made upon His disciples which explains as nothing else can their frank and simple recognition of Him as Divine. He had "made all things new"—themselves, their relation to the world, their relation to God. Alike in its measure and in its character the work which He had wrought in them and for them was the work of God. To Him, therefore, "be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

These are the eternal realities in the presence and consciousness of which St. John proceeds to write his Apocalypse; and they are the same spiritual realities in the presence of which we are to study it, and also to live our lives and write our own histories. First, God: God as Universal Being, the Absolute and All-mighty; God as Universal Energy, and specially energy towards righteousness; but also God in history, God in Christ moving in the affairs of men, making Himself known as Love; and then, human experience of God as mediated through Christ—experience of His mercy, His forgiveness, and His redemption. And as the conviction of these things came to these early Christians, so it comes to us, through Jesus, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead.

## THE VISION OF THE SON OF MAN

REV. i. 9-20

*I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet saying, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches ; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks ; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow ; and his eyes were as a flame of fire ; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace ; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars : and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword : and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not ; I am the first and the last, and the Living one ; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things*

*which shall come to pass hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks are seven churches (R.V.).*

THERE are few portions of the earth's surface more rich in historical and religious interest than that which St. John refers to by the name of "Asia." By that he means, of course, not the great continent to which we have extended the name, nor yet what is to-day known as Asia Minor, but the western end of that great peninsula, where the central plateau slopes and breaks down to the Mediterranean Sea. It was to this that the Romans gave the name of "Asia" when they made it one of the provinces of their Empire, a name which has gradually extended until now it covers the whole continent to the far east of Siberia. For many centuries, down to the occupation of the country by the Turks, which is as the pouring of the sands of the desert on a fertile land, this Asia had fulfilled the destiny marked out for her by Nature as the most convenient bridge between East and West. Trade rolled down its valleys in an opulent stream, to find the shipping of Greece and Rome awaiting it in the safe harbours of Smyrna and Ephesus; the valued products of two continents found their place of meeting and exchange along its coasts,

and, as wealth has never grown so fast as through the handling of this kind of traffic, Asia was for long one of the richest portions of the ancient world, studded with large and prosperous cities, the homes of luxury and comfort. It is not without reason that to this day Croesus, one of its kings, and Pactolus, one of its rivers, are proverbial for boundless wealth and prosperity.

In this outwardly favoured land the seed of the Gospel had been early sown, had taken root, and sprung up in Christian communities which were found in most of the great cities, in Smyrna, Ephesus, Pergamum, and Troas, in Laodicea, Hierapolis, Thyatira, and Sardis, in Philadelphia and Colossae. And among the men to whom these communities of believers in Christ looked up with reverence as having seen, heard, and known the Master in the days of His flesh, was this John, whether he were John the Elder, or, as remains more probable, John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee. Persecution had broken out against these Christians—persecution the cause and character of which we shall have opportunity to examine later. They had suffered even unto blood, and many who had escaped the sword were banished, at least for a time, among them this John. Banishment, and especially to the mines, was a favourite measure with tyrannical governors of the period. Tacitus writing of this period says: “The sea was thickly

strewn with exiles, the crags were stained with the blood of victims." The scene of John's banishment was Patmos, an island some thirty miles round, which lies off the coast about fifteen miles from Ephesus. Thither the exiles were sent to work in the mines or marble quarries. And there John had his vision of the Son of Man.

There is something peculiarly touching in the manner in which he introduces the account of what he had seen. Even this great privilege had not altered the tender and brotherly relation in which he stood to those whom he addressed: "I John, who also am your brother," not as lording it over God's heritage, though he had seen Christ, and received authority from Him to speak. He claims no superiority of age or privilege—"your brother, and fellow-partaker," in what? In tribulation? Yes, and more: in the tribulation and the kingdom—that is, in the twofold and indivisible experience of the tribulation which Christ said they should have "in the world," and the "kingdom" which He also said His Father would give unto them, the kingdom which was not of this world. "In the tribulation and kingdom" they were fellow-partakers, because they were partakers also in the patience by which Christ had said that they would win their souls. And all three, the tribulation and the kingdom

and the patience, were held together in one harmonious whole "in Jesus." Christ was the sphere in which they lived and moved and had their being. Tribulation did not undermine their patience; the kingdom did not make it unnecessary. This was life, and it was a life of brotherhood, of inner peace and of assured triumph for the end. This was the temper and this the experience of the man who saw the Vision.

He had left Patmos ere he wrote this account of it; at least, that is the more probable explanation of his words. But the whole thing is still vivid to his memory. It was the Lord's day, honoured in the hearts of those who knew the Lord, the first day of the week, which those Christians who had seen Jesus, treated with equal respect, and hailed with even greater gladness than the seventh day, the Sabbath of their fathers. It was not likely to be a holiday in the mines. The Romans had small respect for such superstitions. But it was a holy day in the Apostle's heart. Was it not the Lord's day, the day of the week when he had run with Peter to the tomb where they had seen their Master laid, to find it open and empty?—the day when He had made Himself known to them as alive from the dead?—their Redeemer that dieth no more, and at once all their shattered hopes were revived and



restored, for they beheld in Him a Prince and a Saviour, one who had indeed loosed them from their sins and made them as kings and priests unto God. All these experiences had swept back through John's memory as he rose that Lord's day, and flooded all his soul with a sense of peace and the presence of God. In rapt and joyous contemplation of all that the day recalled, he passed into a trance of ecstatic adoration. He was "in the Spirit," the life of sense suspended, heaven open before the eye of faith. Like St. Paul, he might have said: "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell; God knoweth;" but this he knew, that he saw and heard the Lord, the living and exalted Christ. That is the central and unimpeachable fact of John's experience.

In the description of his vision which follows it is interesting and not unimportant to observe what features are absolutely new, and what had already found place in inspired descriptions of the vision of God or of the expected Messiah, and so might be already in John's mind. For as a man's waking thoughts do often provide part at least of the detail and colouring of his dreams, so it may have been with this vision. John's waking thoughts of Christ may thus have contributed features either to what he saw or to the subsequent description of the vision. And if we only take a good reference Bible, and turn up the

passages referred to in the margin here, it is quickly evident how many and how close are the parallels with the language of the Old Testament. When John "heard behind him a great voice as of a trumpet," it was as when Ezekiel says: "Then the Spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing." When he saw One whose "head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow," he saw a figure identical in appearance with that which had been seen by Daniel, when "the Ancient of Days did sit, whose raiment was white as snow, and the hairs of his head like pure wool." The eyes "as a flame of fire," the feet "like burnished brass," the voice "like the voice of many waters," all find their parallels in the visions of Messiah recorded by older prophets. And even the two-edged sword proceeding out of the mouth is but a symbolic picture of the Word of God, "sharper than any two-edged sword," with which according to Jewish expectation the Messiah was to destroy the heathen. These and other phrases in the description, in which we seem to hear echoes of Old Testament prophecies regarding the Christ, only serve when recognised to throw into higher relief the points in which the vision stands in startling contrast with all that had been thought or seen before. And these are two. First, the seven candlesticks in the midst of which the



Lord is seen, and second, the words in which He describes Himself.

As to the second of these features, the language in which the Lord describes Himself: "Fear not"—the words which He had used on more than one well-remembered occasion in His earthly life—are followed by others which no mere man could use: "I am the first and the last and the living one"—applying to Himself the very phrase which in the eighth verse comes from the lips of God: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord, the Almighty." And in order that there may be no mistake as to the claim here made by the risen Christ, He goes on to say: "I have the keys of death and of Hades." The full significance of these last words is only realised if we recall the fact that it was part of the well-known teaching of the Jewish doctors, that "the keys of four things are in the hands of God alone," and these things were Life and the Grave, Food and Rain. When John heard Jesus saying: "I have the keys of death and Hades," he heard Him using words which, according to all his early training and thinking, were proper to God alone. We have here, therefore, another and a striking illustration of the fact that in spite of all his inbred monotheism, in defiance of all his traditional theology, John and those for whom he speaks and writes had given to the

Jesus of history a place not second even to that of God. So great, so overwhelming was the impression He had made on them by His personality in life, and by His victory over death.

But the central thing in the vision is this figure of the Son of Man, such as John had seen Him once upon the Mount of Transfiguration when "His face did shine as the sun," like to Jesus of Nazareth, and yet with a Divine unlikeness. "He is seen arrayed not, as in the days of His ministry, in the short seamless tunic and the flowing cloak which formed the common dress of His time, but in the long robe reaching to the feet, that had been the special garment of the High Priest." He wears the visible emblem of His atoning office for mankind. And He is girded with a golden girdle, "not as of one who toils and runs, fastened round the waist, but around the heart as of one who has entered into the repose of sovereignty." He wears the visible emblem of His royal rule over men. He stands there as Priest and King, and in His hand He holds the seven stars, while round about Him are set the seven golden lamp-stands or candlesticks.

Here we meet a feature in the vision to which no parallel can be found. The earlier literature, both of the prophets and the extra-canonical books, has been searched in vain for anything

that would throw light on these symbols. They belong wholly to this vision. And the explanation of them is that given in the twentieth verse: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are seven churches." This of course raises the question, What are we to understand by "the angels of the churches"? and that is by no means easy to answer. On the one hand, it has been thought by many that "angel" is the name for a representative man, or body of men, the rulers, elders, or bishop of each particular congregation. Against this have to be set the facts that the word "angel" is never used in the New Testament of a human being, except in two cases, where it means simply "messenger": that it is not certain that at the time when these letters were written the development of Church government in Asia Minor had reached the point where one individual stood out at the head of the community as its representative and ruler; and that when we come to consider the letters themselves we shall find that the "angel" to whom each letter is addressed is identified with his Church as partaker of its character and also of its destiny to a degree which could not be predicated of any human representative. In fact, so far as the contents of the letters are concerned, each one of them might as well be directed to the particular Church itself as to "the

angel" of the Church. The meaning of the address seems rather to be found in connection with the idea of "guardian angels," of angels as representatives in heaven of individuals and communities on earth. There is authority for the idea in our Lord's words regarding the children; that "their angels do behold the face of my Father." On this suggestion the angel of each Church would be its heavenly counterpart and representative, the composite personality of the Church as seen by God. In the vision each of these angels is symbolised by a star. These stars, the heavenly symbols of the Churches, are held in the hand of the risen Lord, and He moves among the candlesticks which represent the Churches themselves.

That was what John saw in Patmos on the Lord's day. Its significance becomes clear as soon as the purpose for which it was vouchsafed is understood. These Christian communities, which for some reason not discoverable by us were selected out from the Churches of Asia, were, like their neighbours, in most imminent danger. And the danger was of more kinds than one. They were threatened from without with a renewal of the persecution they had already undergone, but renewal in a fiercer and more organised form. As we shall see later, the State was no longer merely the agent giving

effect to the hostility of the Jews or heathen to whose religious prejudices the presence of the Christians was offensive. The Roman State had itself set up a religion which was utterly abhorrent to all Christian sentiment and belief. The deification of the reigning Emperor, mad as it seems to us, had become part of the Provincial administration, and especially in the Province of Asia the worship of the Roman Emperor as God had been taken up by the populace with enthusiasm, and was being enforced by the Government as the duty of every loyal subject. Times of cruel searching and sifting were evidently at hand, when the genuineness of every Christian's loyalty to the one and only God would be tested as by fire. And the Churches were but ill prepared for such a test. For there was danger to their vitality from within. They had been invaded in various degrees by laxity and coldness, by false doctrine and the example of base surrender to heathen standards, by divisions and party spirit; and every true disciple of Jesus must have been looking forward to the future with foreboding, if not with dismay. To John, whose relations with these Churches gave him both influence and responsibility, there came by means of this vision the command to write what should brace the faith and steel the courage of these communities to face the coming trial,

and the vision itself was intended and calculated in the first place to brace his own faith and steel his own courage. It was a vision of the things that are, the unseen things which really count in the history of men, calculated to counteract for ever afterwards the impression of things as they seem. What seemed to be the case was that each of these Christian communities was lost as a drop in the surrounding ocean of worldliness and hostility to God, isolated from its neighbours many miles away across the hills, far from help and at the mercy of men. What was really true, as revealed to the Apostle in his vision, was that each of these Churches formed part of a perfect whole represented by the mystic number seven, that all of them were held together by the unseen presence in their midst of the risen Son of Man, that each of these Churches as it was seen by God was held in the hand of Him who is mighty to save, who holds the keys of death and of Hades.

And John sets the record of his vision here in the forefront of his book, partly because it gives the explanation of his call to write, and partly because this is characteristic of his method, and indeed the great service he has rendered to the Church. The key to time is eternity. Human life transacts itself, as it were, upon a stage, and only finds its true meaning and value when seen



against the true background, the background of things that are. To the ordinary observer, uninstructed by the Spirit in the mind of God, it may seem as though there were nothing but a flat curtain just behind the figures on the stage, and for him both men and their actions and their sufferings lose their true proportions. But John, the inspired man, sees through the veil, sees the illimitable distance beyond, the whole, of which each man's brief part upon the stage is but a fraction, the eternal which gives its true value to what is in time. And, further, he sees the figure of Christ central and dominating, already the interpretation of much in the experience of His people, but also Author of that deathless hope in the power of which they might face the rest without interpretation. We shall have taken a great step towards the understanding of this book if we realise that through all its details it is this single and commanding impression which John has received through the vision of the Son of Man, Christ living, supreme, aware, and caring for His Churches, holding them, in fact, in His hand. What he saw as a whole, the here and the beyond, the temporal and the eternal, he has necessarily to describe in succession, first the one and then the other; but always with the conviction that what governs, interprets, and even justifies, the

present is the eternal. No threats can dismay, no danger can cow, no temptation can overmaster those who have seen with him the Son of Man ever moving through the circle of communities which form His Church—nay, holding them as a circlet of brilliants in His hand. Nought can make them afraid ; for they endure as seeing the invisible.



## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

REV. ii. 1-7

*These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks : I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false ; and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God (R.V.).*

THE letters to the Seven Churches form a distinct and well-marked section of this book, and have often been studied separately. And yet they are closely connected with what has gone before and with much that follows. Each one of them is

written at the express command of the Son of Man whom the Apostle saw in his vision, and is, in fact, written in His name. And it is to all of these same Churches that John has been instructed to send "a book" containing an account of what he has seen: this instruction he carries out in the chapters which follow the letters. The principles which they illustrate are woven into the texture of the whole work, and much of their symbolism has a common source with that which appears later. But even taken by themselves the letters offer a fascinating subject of study, and afford some of the most interesting glimpses that we get into Christian life towards the end of the first century, and not a few most valuable suggestions for Christian life in the beginning of the twentieth.

It is at once apparent that all the seven letters are constructed on a common plan. Each one of them opens with the same command to write "to the angel of the Church": followed by the introductory words, "These things saith." Each letter then proceeds to describe the Speaker under one aspect of His power, one which is quoted from the description of the Figure seen in the vision of the first chapter. Each Church addressed is then characterised in a sentence or two beginning, "I know," and there follows an exhortation fitted to the circumstances and

character of the Church ; and each letter culminates in a promise "to him that overcometh." In the first three cases this precedes, in the last four it follows, a solemn appeal for attention : "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." Within a framework so carefully constructed and so precisely followed, the variable elements in each letter are so exquisitely adjusted to the history, circumstances, and character of each several Church that we seem to get "its very form and pressure" reproduced on a perfectly plastic surface. Brief as the letters are, each one of them presents as in a clear-cut cameo the portrait of the Church addressed. And every trait which is added from without to our knowledge of the history, topography, or idiosyncrasy of the particular Church, only confirms the wonderful accuracy of the portrait. The delineation of these features as they have been preserved in the landscape, the annals and the archæological remains of the several localities, has recently been achieved with unequalled fulness and accuracy by Professor W. M. Ramsay, to whose book, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, every student of the subject should refer.

We should, however, do less than justice to the value of these letters if we allowed ourselves to overlook the second aspect in which

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they are as remarkable as in the first. Each of the Churches is individualised in the most effective way; but each of them is also addressed in a representative capacity, and all together stand for the whole Church, reflecting the strength and weakness, the victories and shortcomings which characterise the Church of Christ wherever it may be found. It is possible that, as Mr. Ramsay thinks, each Church to which a letter is sent is to be looked on as the head and centre of a group of local Churches: and yet the writer "does not think of the Smyrna group when he addresses Smyrna, nor is he thinking of the Universal Church: he addresses Smyrna alone: he has it clear before his mind, with all its special qualities and individualities. Yet the group which had its centre in Smyrna and the whole Universal Church alike found that the letter which was written for Smyrna applied equally to them, for it was a statement of eternal truths and universal principles." "The idea that the individual Church is part of the Universal Church, that it stands for it after the usual symbolic fashion of the Apocalypse, is never far from the writer's mind; and he passes rapidly between the two points of view, the direct address to the local Church as an individual body with special needs of its own, and the general application and apostrophe to the entire

Church as symbolised by the particular local Church." \*

Ephesus, to the Church in which city the first of these letters is sent, stood foremost among the seven in rank, in historical importance, and in wealth. But in no one of these features on which she prided herself was her superiority unchallenged. Planted at the sea-end of one of the great trade-routes from the East, and owing everything to this favourable position, she had watched for centuries the slow silting up of the harbour on which her trade depended, and the growth of a younger rival in Smyrna, some fifty miles to the north. But Ephesus was not entirely dependent upon her trade and commercial supremacy; she was the political capital of the Roman Province, and even more distinguished in the eyes of her inhabitants and neighbours by having within her walls the famous Temple of Artemis, "Diana of the Ephesians," of whom we hear so much in the Acts of the Apostles. This venerated shrine attracted year by year many thousands of pilgrims, and therefore no little wealth, to the city. The strategic importance of such a centre for the missionary work of the Church had been promptly recognised by St. Paul, who laboured longer at Ephesus than at any other town in Asia Minor. And the result was that he left

\* See Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, pp. 200, 206.

behind him a Church the fame of which in Christendom matched the fame of the city in the political world.\*

"To the angel of the church at Ephesus"—that is, to its heavenly counterpart and responsible representative. In modern language the angel of the Church is in each case that Church's better self—that self which is stimulated to consciousness whenever God's voice is truly heard by it. Just as "the entrance of his word" giveth light to our own better selves, so Christ by this address seeks to waken the Church's better self to activity and effectiveness. And what He says falls into three parts—Recognition, Warning, and Promise.

First comes the Recognition: "I know thy works." The same words are used to five out of the seven Churches. As another New Testament writer puts it, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed towards his name." The "works" in this case are further defined as "thy toil and patience," and the meaning of the whole is well illustrated in the expanded phrase used by St. Paul in writing to the Thessalonians—"remembering your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope." Their "toil" is active and laborious

\* Ignatius speaks of the Church at Ephesus as "renowned to all ages."



effort to resist and overcome evil; their "patience" the steadfast endurance of pressure and persecution in the cause of Christ. Poor little Church of some few hundreds gathered out of the many thousands in the great city, passing cautiously through the streets to their place of meeting, prepared to meet persecution yet not courting it; labouring with zeal and faith to make known to others the good news which they had received, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself"; putting up with the disabilities of their new relation to the world, its contempt, its dislike, its hostility, its possible cruelty; bearing all this with patient endurance "as seeing him who is invisible," and yet wondering sometimes what is to be the end of it, what is the good of it now. For Ephesus goes on pretty much as before, with its frivolity and revelries, its immoralities and indifference. The Temple of Artemis is thronged as ever; the processions of its votaries sweep through the streets. The frequent salutation from Christian lips, "Maranatha" ("the Lord cometh"), sometimes rings hollow with the consciousness of hope too long deferred. "As things have been they remain." Who is, after all, the better for their toil and patience? Who cares, in Ephesus? To such thoughts the answer comes, "I know thy works." Every act of faith, every ministry of self-denial, every



humble acceptance of the Cross for the Master's sake, finds its recognition from the Master's eye, has its record in heaven.

And these Christians at Ephesus had one quality which called for special acknowledgment—that which St. Paul refers to as the power to discern spirits, to distinguish between what was false and true in that which claimed to come from God. This gift was one for which there was special need at a time when many were taking it upon themselves to instruct Christ's flock, while as yet there was no established standard of Christian faith and practice. The number of men was by this time very considerable, who exercised a Christian ministry, apostolic or prophetic, on the ground that they had received the gifts of the Spirit for the purpose. Many, doubtless, had received a call from God similar to that which had led to the ordination of Paul and Barnabas. But there were others who had no such authority for their ministry, who had been moved by personal motives of varying degrees of unworthiness to exercise the ministry without having received a true call. The young Churches were continually being visited by strangers who professed to be Apostles or Prophets of Christ, and they needed to be always on their guard against the intrusion of false teachers and false doctrine. In his general Epistle St. John makes

both the situation and the warning clear: "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." In these circumstances a Christian Church could hardly have higher testimony borne to it than this: "Thou didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, and thou didst find them false." The Church of Ephesus knew the real messengers of Christ when it heard them: the others it recognised in their true character, and would have nothing to do with them.

The whole situation is brought out very clearly, and the favourable judgment here passed on Ephesus is strikingly confirmed, in another letter written to the same Church twenty or thirty years later, by Ignatius, bishop and martyr. A few quotations from this letter will speak for themselves: "Some are wont of malicious guile to hawk about the Name." "I have learned that certain persons passed through you from yonder, bringing evil doctrine: whom ye suffered not to sow seed in you, for ye stopped your ears, so that ye might not receive the seed sown by them." "Now Onesimus of his own accord highly praiseth your orderly conduct in God, for that ye all live according to truth, and that no heresy hath a home among you: nay, you do not so much as listen to any one, if he speak of aught

else save concerning Jesus Christ in truth." There we have both the presence of the false teachers and the firm way in which they were ignored by the Ephesian Christians. And from the same pen we have testimony to those other qualities in the Church which are touched upon in this letter. Ignatius, on his way to martyrdom, writes: "I ought to be trained by you for the contest, in faith, in admonition, in endurance, in long-suffering."

It would be very interesting if we could know with certainty who these false teachers were, and what was the nature of their teaching. What is most probable is, that they were men of the same school as those who dogged the footsteps of St. Paul, professing to be apostles of Christ, but in reality emissaries of the Judaising party at Jerusalem. If so, the burden of their teaching would be that men must needs become Jews in becoming disciples of Christ, and so were bound to "keep the whole law." They would be representatives of the party with whom the Apostle of the Gentiles deals so trenchantly in his Epistle to the Galatians, desiring to bring Christ's people once more into bondage under ordinances, and impugning the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free. And when the Church at Ephesus would have none of such teachers, they showed that they had within themselves the Spirit of

Christ, a sure touchstone of the truth of the Gospel.

But even a Church which invites such recognition of its works and its faithfulness does not escape criticism, and incurs serious warning. "I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." These people were still doing the works, but the inner fire had burnt low, and the works themselves, even though outwardly the same, were not now "the first works" in the eye of God. The external evidence of their faith was like the pointer on a self-registering thermometer: it marked the highest level which their spiritual temperature had reached; but where was the mercury now? We may take it that there never was a community of Christians, of some years' standing, perhaps there never was an individual Christian, to whom at some time or other the Spirit of Christ had not this remonstrance to address: "Thou hast left thy first love." It may be that many at least of the works which were prompted by that first love are still being done; and yet God hath this against us: we have this against ourselves. We say, Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?

How, then, does the Spirit deal with this condition? As revealed in this letter, in two ways: partly by the utterance of a solemn threat, and

partly by loving counsel. The threat is that the Lord will remove the Church "out of its place," a threat not of destruction, as some have thought, but of material and grievous change. The condition of this Church is not like that of Laodicea, for example: it is not one which calls for even the threat of extinction; Ephesus had true love and genuine loyalty, and the threat of Divine discipline would meet the case.

There is an interesting and, in many ways, an attractive explanation which has been put forward by Professor Ramsay, based upon a close study of the topography and history of Ephesus. He points out that one characteristic which belongs to Ephesus and distinguishes its history from that of all the other cities, is change. "In most ancient sites one is struck by the immutability of Nature and the mutability of all human additions to Nature. In Ephesus it is the shifting character of the natural conditions on which the city depends for prosperity that strikes every careful observer, every student either of history or of Nature. This scenery and this site have varied from century to century. Where there was water, there is now land; what was a populated city in one period, ceased to be so in another, and has again become the centre of life for the valley; where at one time there was only bare hillside or the gardens of a city some miles

distant, at another time there was a city crowded with inhabitants, and this has again relapsed into its earlier condition: the harbour in which St. John and St. Paul landed has become a mere marsh, and the theatre where the excited crowd met and shouted to Diana, desolate and ruinous as it is, has been more permanent than the harbour. . . . The city followed the sea, and changed from place to place to maintain its importance as the only harbour of the valley." \*

Accordingly, Mr. Ramsay concludes: "A threat of removing the Church from its place would be inevitably understood by the Ephesians as a denunciation of another change in the site of the city, and must have been so intended by the writer."

Should a threat of this character seem hardly grave enough for what is here predicted, then we must fall back on the explanation of persecution and the consequent scattering of the Church, which was indeed its fate. The main point is to observe that it is the candlestick, the earthly form of the Church, which is to be moved out of its place; the star remains in the hand of the Redeemer. For there is at Ephesus, as in nearly every community which names itself by the name of Christ (the case of Laodicea a possible exception), an invisible Church, a proportion great or

\* See Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 245.



small of those whose names are written in heaven, whose relation to their Saviour cannot be affected even by the scattering of the visible Church. And it is they who will lay both the threat and the counsel to heart. The counsel is to "remember" and "repent." Remember the early time, "the love of thine espousals." He is the same: He changeth not. His love is great and strong as ever. And thy need of it is as great as ever: nay, it is greater. For the only thing that causes thee to shrink from remembering is shame—shame that the cares and pleasures of this life have been allowed to choke the good seed, shame that thy love has been unequal to His, less constant, less pure, less strong. And for that shame He and He alone has the remedy. It was concerning an Israel that had sinned her mercies that the Lord proclaimed through Hosea: "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness and justice, in leal love and tender mercies." Remember the high privilege from which thou art fallen; remember it not as lost but as offered to thee by the same pierced hand by which it was at the first bestowed: remember and repent, and do the first works in the enthusiasm of the first love.

There remains the promise: and that is connected in this case with another point which has



been recorded to the credit of the Church at Ephesus, "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." About these Nicolaitans we know practically nothing beyond what can be gathered from allusions in these letters. In the *Century Bible* the present writer, following many good authorities, was inclined to regard them as identical with the false teachers previously referred to in this letter, those "which call themselves apostles, and they are not." But on further consideration, it seems more in accordance with all the available evidence to see in the false apostles and the Nicolaitans two distinct and, indeed, antithetical forces which endangered the purity of the Church from opposite sides. "Ye must keep the whole law of Moses," said the intruders from the side of Judaism. "Nay," said the Christians of Ephesus, who had drunk in Paul's teaching, "not so, for Christ hath made us free from the law." "If that be so," said another party, the Nicolaitans, "then let us use our freedom, let us show that we are above the law, by living as we please." And so they threatened to turn the liberty of the Gospel into an excuse for all manner of libertinism and immorality. These two tendencies were the Scylla and Charybdis between which the Church of the first century had to find the middle path of safety. And the true Christian standard which

prevailed at Ephesus enabled the Church there to perceive the falsehood of this extreme also: as they rejected the *teaching* of the false teachers, so they hated the *works* of the Nicolaitans. Not that they were not tempted, some of them by the lust of the flesh, tempted to think that these Nicolaitans were right, and that a Christian might do with impunity what for another man was sin. But they had "an unction from the Holy One," and they knew that this was not the mind of Christ.

The form which this temptation took gives its form to the promise with which the letter closes. Were they tempted by this diabolical attempt to legitimise the worst of human passions, tempted by the desire to gratify carnal appetites regardless of the moral law, let them continue to resist, understanding that he that doeth evil is evil, whatever he may believe. Let them continue to fight manfully in this conflict, and "to him that overcometh" shall be given "to eat of the tree of life," of fruit which is not as the fruit of Sodom, but prepared by God for the true and perfect satisfaction of human nature's needs.

The Nicolaitans are not extinct. Our modern cities are as hospitable to them as Ephesus or any of the cities of the Roman Empire. They have many avenues of insidious approach for their nauseous doctrines. For the young,

especially, they lie in wait, urging that self-indulgence in natural appetite cannot be wrong, daring even to charge upon God the evil results of such self-indulgence. They spread snares of every kind for the unwary and the unwarned, even inventing ways to rouse "the beast in man." The only safeguard is to hate all such instigations to evil, to hate as Christ hates them; and then to claim from Him the fulfilment of this great promise, to him that overcometh. "I will give him to eat of the tree of life," of the tree whose fruit does satisfy, of the tree whose satisfaction endures: all else turns to ashes: this fulfilment of desire which comes from the hand of God is both perfect and eternal.

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

REV. ii. 8-11

*These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and lived again: I know thy tribulation and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death (R.V.).*

SMYRNA is the only one of the seven cities to which these letters are addressed which remains to this day a place of importance. The sites on which the others stood are now either vacant or occupied only by a few mud-houses in the midst of ancient ruins. But the traveller to Smyrna finds a large and flourishing town, with a population of a quarter of a million or more, and the centre of a wide-reaching and productive

commerce. It is said, indeed, to be the most solidly prosperous city within the Turkish Empire, and the reason of its prosperity is at least partially disclosed in the fact that by the Turks it is called "Ismid Giaour," Smyrna the heathen: in other words, its population is largely composed of those who profess Christianity and are at least penetrated with Christian ideas. There is, however, a natural cause besides for this prosperity, which has lasted now for more than two thousand years, and that is the situation of the city at the top of a great land-locked bay or gulf, in which great fleets could lie in safety, and also at the lower end of one of the great river-valleys which strike up from the coast into the heart of Asia Minor. Thus, Smyrna was hardly second to Ephesus as an emporium of trade, and indeed vaunted itself so highly that it carried on a long struggle both with Ephesus on the south and with Pergamum on the north for the coveted title of "First City in Asia."

Of its early religious history we know very little beyond the fact that as Ephesus was famous for its devotion to Artemis and for the splendour of her temple there, so Smyrna was the special home of the cult of Dionysus, the god of vintage and of revelry. But there is in the Roman historian Tacitus a passage which throws an interesting light on the religious as well as the

political situation in Smyrna in the first century. The relation of the Province of Asia to Rome was roughly that of India to Great Britain : and then, as now, the dependency not infrequently sought to show its loyalty and to secure the Imperial favour by the erection of monuments or public buildings. In the year 23 A.D. the cities of Asia had obtained leave to erect in one of them a temple in honour of Tiberius, and three years later they all sent commissioners to Rome to plead their respective claims to furnish the site. " The Emperor," says Tacitus, " in order to turn away public attention from a scandal," frequently attended the Senate, and on several days listened to the ambassadors from Asia arguing as to which city should be the one where the temple was to be erected. Eleven cities were engaged in the contest, equally ambitious, but not equally important. Situated not far apart from one another they laid stress on their antiquity and their loyalty to Rome. But Laodicea, Tralles, Troas, and some others were passed over at once, as not sufficiently important. There was more hesitation about Halicarnassus, which for twelve hundred years had been undisturbed by any earthquake : Pergamum was rejected on the very ground put forward as a ground of claim—that it had already a temple of Augustus. Ephesus and Miletus were already too closely associated



with the ritual and worship of Diana and Apollo. Only Sardis and Smyrna remained. The Sardian advocates strove hard, pointing to the history of their town, its early treaty with Rome, the fertilising power of its streams, the wealth of the neighbourhood, and the excellence of the climate. The envoys from Smyrna, however, claimed a yet greater antiquity, a loyalty to Rome which stretched yet further back, and special services rendered to a Roman army in great straits, when the citizens of Smyrna had stripped themselves of their clothing to cover the shivering Roman troops. So when the vote of the Senate was taken, Smyrna carried the day.

Some sixty years had elapsed since that scene in Rome, when John wrote this letter to the Christians in Smyrna; but the city had not declined either in wealth or in devotion to Rome. And neither its wealth nor the direction of its enthusiasm was favourable to the Christian cause and the Christian people in the city. Poverty and tribulation were the outward marks of the Church there, but its inward marks were steadfastness and the favour of God.

It has been already pointed out that the more thoroughly we comprehend the history, the local circumstances, and the social surroundings of each of these Churches, the more are we in a position to appreciate the accuracy of these



letters, and the exquisite adaptation of every phrase in them, to each special case. Of this a good illustration is found here. Like all the rest, this letter begins with a description of Christ, the Speaker, in a phrase which is taken from the full description of the Son of Man as John had seen Him. And as there is in some of the cases an unmistakable appropriateness in the phrase selected to the circumstances of the Church which is addressed, so it is natural to assume an appropriateness even in those cases where the application is less immediately obvious. To Smyrna Christ speaks as "the first and the last, who was dead, and yet liveth." What could be more appropriate in addressing "an age-long city half as old as time"? A city where the population prided itself on this very antiquity, and traced its foundation back to the gods themselves. A city where, as the beginning seemed to be lost in the dim past, so the end seemed a thing unthinkable. And yet the Christians in this city set against all this material splendour and this vast duration the conviction that there were higher things, things more precious and more lasting. How difficult it was for them to keep alive this conviction in the face of what men called facts! "I," with whom you have to do, "I am the first and the last": even before Smyrna was, I am: and when Smyrna is for-

gotten, I shall be, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And even the death which must surely overtake each one of you, the martyr's death which awaits some of you, makes no difference. I was dead, and yet live. Neither time and the things of time, nor death and the agonies of death, do alter life for those who have heard My voice, and know Me as their Saviour.

Coming to the body of this letter, we find three things made prominent—the outward condition of the Church, its poverty, the inward spirit or temper of the Church, its loyalty, and the final reward of loyalty shown through poverty and tribulation, namely, life. “I know thy tribulation and thy poverty.” The tribulation arose partly from the pressure of the world, the constant friction of antagonistic ideas and diverse aims in life, such as was and is inevitable when a Christian community is planted in the midst of a heathen population. From organised persecution Smyrna had up to this time been free, but none the less there would be for every true disciple of Jesus a very real bearing of the Cross, a daily call for patience and self-sacrifice, “for the testimony of Jesus.” But the tribulation was also due in part to the presence, in large numbers, of Jews who had only a nominal claim to belong to God's Israel, and proved their own righteousness rather

by attacking the believers in a crucified Messiah than by walking in the law of Moses. It does not appear that these were Jewish Christians, such as troubled the Church at Ephesus: they were Jews by birth and by profession, who had departed so far from the standards of their religion that they no longer deserved the name, while from the standpoint of fierce orthodoxy they reviled the Christians. Such Jews were found by this time in all the chief cities of the empire, a powerful body, and unscrupulous in their hostility to the followers of Christ. But they would appear to have been unusually strong and unusually bitter at Smyrna. For when some fifty years later many Christians perished in the persecution, and amongst them the saintly Polycarp, it is recorded that the Jews were eager in bringing faggots to the theatre for the burning of the Christians, "sabbath day though it was." Here there was cause enough for "tribulation," and it had to be borne with the added disadvantages of poverty.

It is very significant that the Church which, if it does not receive the same positive praise as that of Philadelphia, is at any rate distinct from all the other Churches in receiving no reproach at all, should be also the one marked out from the rest by its poverty. It was a living illustration of the beatitude pronounced by Jesus,

“Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.” For our Lord does so absolutely reverse the common judgment of the world, that He holds them blessed who are poor in this world’s goods. Not that there is any virtue in being poor, or specially attaching to those who are poor, but because as a matter of experience riches, wealth, social security are so great a danger to the higher life of man, because the moral demand made upon a rich man ere he can qualify for the Kingdom of Heaven is so much more severe than that which is felt by the poor. Many a poor man cries out in the midst of his poverty: “How hard it is to trust God!” and yet he trusts Him. But for the rich man it is not only hard. Christ thought it almost impossible; because he requires not only to have faith in the unseen, but to have want of faith in the seen, want of faith in that riches the evidence of which is before him every hour, want of faith in his power, although every one round him bows down to it, want of faith in himself, although to human eyes he appears to be the master of his circumstances. If only men could open their hearts to the conviction that Christ was right in this matter, those who are rich in any form of possession would look on their riches with trembling, and those who are poor would find in the daily looking to the hand of God a

daily discovery that this is true: "God hath chosen them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him."

This was the experience of Smyrna. The outward poverty of the Christians there was accompanied by an inward loyalty to God, so deep and strong that it outweighed their poverty, and overcame their tribulation—nay, might be trusted to overcome the further tribulation which was looming in the near future. For their Lord would not conceal from them that more and greater trouble was to come. In their case tribulation had wrought patience, and patience had brought about a condition of testedness, in which they could bear with equanimity even the announcement of new trials. They were their Lord's friends, and He would not conceal from them what was in His mind: "Ye shall have tribulation ten days."

Why "ten days"? Much thought and ingenuity had been spent in the attempt to discover the meaning of this and the many other periods of time which are indicated in this book. And as this is the first occasion when such a number is met with, it may be well to consider the general question of the place of numbers in the symbolism of the Apocalypse. It may be said at once that so far as they refer to extension

in time or space, no one of these numbers is to be understood literally. When they refer to objects, the candlesticks, the Churches, the heads and horns of the Monster, the "living creatures," and the like, they are to be taken literally in a sense. That is to say, the Apostle had before his mind in these cases a definite number of objects corresponding to the figure which he gives. In regard to space and time he uses numbers to express rather their character and quality than their extent or duration. One set of numbers, notably three, seven, ten, and twelve, with their multiples, convey the ideas of completeness and satisfaction, and so are associated with the merciful dispensations of God; another set, notably three and a half in various forms and multiples (forty and two months, a thousand two hundred and three-score days, a time times and half a time) convey the ideas of broken continuity, imperfection and confusion, and so are associated with the domination of wickedness or the punitive dispensations of God. Such numbers in all the Apocalyptic literature have a purely conventional value. A "thousand years" stands for a rounded and complete period of long but unknown duration. "Three and a half years" derives its sinister meaning in part from its being a broken seven, in part from its having been the duration of the



reign of Antiochus, when "the abomination of desolation" first made its appearance in Jewish experience.

It follows that in the ordinary sense of the word there is no chronology to be sought or to be found in this book. "The Seer does not look forward to age succeeding age or century century. To him the whole period between the first and the second coming of Christ is but 'a little time,' and whatever is to happen in it 'must shortly come to pass.' In truth he can hardly be said to deal with the lapse of time at all. He deals with the essential characteristics of the Divine government in time, whether it be long or short. Shall the revolving years be in our sense short, these characteristics will nevertheless come forth with a clearness which shall leave man without excuse. Shall they be in our sense long, the unfolding of God's eternal plan will be only again and again made manifest."\*

But it is not only vain to seek to construct a chronology of the future out of the periods mentioned in this book, and thus to establish "the time of the end." It seems perilously like presumption in view of our Lord's specific declaration: "Ye know not the day nor the hour." The time of the end is a secret reserved in the mind of the Most High alone: "Of that day and hour knoweth no

\* Milligan, *Expositor's Bible*, p. 112.



man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." And this was clearly recognised by the Church of the first century, in whose understanding it was firmly fixed that the day of the Lord would come "as a thief in the night." The perpetually recurring admonition to watchfulness would have had no meaning, had it been possible to extort from Scripture the secret of the date when the end would come. Even if we had the material, which we have not, it would not become us to pry into what has been declared to be God's secret: the true attitude of the Christian is that of waiting and watching for his Lord's coming, and that is the attitude which the whole of this book serves to inculcate.

The "ten days" of tribulation, then, to which Smyrna is to be exposed are not to be interpreted as describing its precise duration; the phrase simply announces a period of persecution which is to be brief and definite. The Church at Smyrna could be trusted to receive such an announcement without questioning and without dismay. Her members were sound at heart. They had not made compromise either with false teaching or with libertinism. And the history of the Church within the next half-century showed both the fulfilment of this prediction, and how fully the Lord's confidence in His people was justified.

The evidence of this is found in that most

interesting letter which was sent by the Church at Smyrna to another Church in which an account is given of a fierce persecution which had broken out, and of the martyrdom of Polycarp, which brought it to a close. "The church of God which sojourneth at Smyrna to the church of God which sojourneth at Philomelium, and to all the holy brotherhoods of the holy and universal church sojourning in every place." "We write unto you, brethren, an account of what befel those that suffered martyrdom and especially the blessed Polycarp, who stayed the persecution; having as it were set his seal upon it by his martyrdom." Then we hear about the steadfastness of other witnesses to Christ. "The right noble Germanicus encouraged their timorousness through the constancy that was in him; and he fought with the wild beasts in a signal way. For when the pro-consul wished to prevail upon him, and bade him have pity on his youth, he used violence and dragged the wild beast towards him, desiring the more speedily to obtain a release from their unrighteous and lawless life. So after this all the multitude, marvelling at the bravery of the God-beloved and God-fearing people of the Christians, raised a cry, 'Away with the Atheist: let search be made for Polycarp.'" Then we read how the friends of the aged bishop strove to persuade him, saying: "Why, what harm is there in

saying, Cæsar is Lord, and offering incense to his statue, and so saving thyself?" But at first he gave them no answer; when, however, they persisted, he said, "I am not going to do what you counsel me"; and when he was brought into the theatre, the magistrate pressed him again, and said: "Swear the oath, and I will release thee: revile the Christ." And Polycarp's reply was: "Fourscore and six years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong: how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" So he gave his body to be burned, and as his flock put it: "Having by his endurance overcome the unrighteous ruler in the conflict, and so received the crown of immortality, he rejoiceth in company with the apostles and all righteous men, and blesseth our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our bodies and helmsman of our souls, and shepherd of the universal Church." \*

"Having received the crown of immortality." The Church at Smyrna must have laid to heart the promise with which the letter in the Revelation closes. They were used to seeing the victors in the games crowned with the wreath, which was made of perishable leaves; but for themselves they had learned to look beyond their daily conflict with evil, through the fire and smoke of martyrdom, to a crown of imperishable

\* See *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Lightfoot's translation.

glory—a crown which consisted in life for evermore. For them death had no terrors. It had lost that which alone gave it its sting; for Christ had “loosed them from their sins.” The “second death” which the Jews around them thought of as the portion of the wicked after the resurrection had no terrors either. The Christ for whom they lived, was the Christ in whom they lived; and He was alive for evermore. To be absent from the body, therefore, was only to be more really present with the Lord.

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM

REV. ii. 12-17

*And to the angel of the church at Pergamum write; These things, saith he, that hath the sharp two-edged sword: I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. Repent, therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it (R.V.).*

THE passage from the *Annals* of Tacitus, which was quoted in the last chapter, illustrates not only the relative claims of the seven cities to recognition by the Roman State, but also the

social and civil significance which the worship of the Emperor had attained in the first third of the first century. The competition among the Asian cities was for the honour of providing the site for a new temple of the reigning Emperor; and as this subtle and diabolical amalgam of patriotism, politics, and religion is the subject of repeated allusion in the Apocalypse, its origin and its meaning require to be noted. It began in a natural and, granted the polytheism on which it rested, a comparatively harmless way. The population of Western Asia Minor had always been notorious for its superstitious character, the avidity with which it welcomed new deities and new forms of worship, and for the fanatical enthusiasm with which it abandoned itself to religious excitement. Rome, as a political power, stood to these people very much as Britain stands to many parts of India; and just as in India we find some of the native peoples doing a kind of homage to what they call the British *Raj*, just as some of them have even gone the length of paying Divine honours to the name of one at least of our great administrators (John Nicholson), so the natives of "Asia" looked with something more than reverence on the great civilising power of the West, and were ready enough to conceive of the ruling sovereign in distant Rome as something more than man.



The initiative, however, came from the side of the Roman rulers themselves. The claim had been advanced by, or for, Julius Cæsar that he was descended from the goddess Venus Genitrix; and an obsequious assembly at Ephesus had pronounced him to be "god made manifest, the son of Ares and Aphrodite." His successor, Augustus, was the object of yet more intense devotion as the Saviour of the civilised world, and a kind of incarnation of the genius of Rome. "In the condition of human thoughts and religious conceptions that then prevailed, such an intense feeling must take a religious form. Whatever deeply affected the minds of a body of men, few or many, inevitably assumed a religious character. No union or association of any kind was then possible except in a common religion, whose ritual expressed the common feelings and purpose. Thus the growth of an Asian Provincial religion of Rome and the Emperor was natural." \*

The material forms which this Emperor-worship took included the erection of temples and the establishment of priestly guilds for their service. The first of these temples to be erected in Asia was fixed at Pergamum, and had been increasing in importance and prestige for over a hundred years when this letter was written. Pergamum

\* See Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 118.



had been selected as the site for this temple because it was historically and officially the capital of the province. During the first Christian century it was being slowly ousted from its primacy through the growing importance of Ephesus and Smyrna, both of which were geographically better situated for the purposes of commerce. But Pergamum had been the royal city of ancient native kings, and situated as it was on a magnificent hill "standing out boldly in the level plain, and dominating the valley and mountain on the south," it was also a "royal city" to behold; and it remained at least till the end of this century the seat of Roman government, and the residence of the Pro-consul of Asia.

These two features, Pergamum, the seat of the Provincial government, and Pergamum, the site of the oldest and most famous temple of Emperor-worship, provide at once the key to the situation of the Church in that city, and the clue to several phrases in this letter.

"Thus saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword." Again we have in the phrase here chosen to describe the author of the letter, one selected from the description of the Son of Man in the first chapter, and the appropriateness of the choice is obvious. At Pergamum dwelt the Roman Governor, the one man in Asia who

had what the Romans called the *jus gladii*, the power of the sword, the power of life and death. It was to Pergamum, therefore, that prisoners were taken, including such as were accused of being Christians, in order that they might undergo the sentence and suffering of death. The message to Pergamum comes, therefore, from the one, "who hath the sharp two-edged sword," to indicate the fact that behind the Roman Governor and above him, is One whose authority is mightier still, by whose will princes do govern, and to whom even the tyrants of the earth are responsible. By this phrase the trembling Church of Pergamum is bidden to look past the threatening world-power, and to fix its gaze on the King of kings, who is "mighty to save."

In like manner the description of the Church as dwelling "where Satan's throne is" conveys an allusion to the prevailing cult of the Emperor. This had reached its climax in the reign of Domitian, within which these letters were probably written. It was Domitian who insisted on being addressed by his subjects as "our Lord and God," and at the same time the Provincial government had discovered the value for its own purposes of fostering and extending this monstrous worship of a man. By its means they obtained a new and very effective instru-

ment for controlling their subject races. They skilfully identified submission to the civil power with religion, and made conformity to the ritual a test of loyalty to the State. The heathen subjects of Rome found no difficulty in enlarging their Pantheon to include another god, in paying their dues in the temple of the Emperor as well as in those of Diana or Æsculapius. Some Jews also appear to have conformed or compromised in this matter; at any rate there is no record of their suffering persecution because they refused the worship of the Emperor. And here is at least a possible explanation of the contemptuous indignation of the Apostle against "those who say they are Jews and are not." It would be as open a denial of their faith in Jehovah for them to offer incense in these temples as it was for the Christians a denial of their faith in God, the Father of their Lord Jesus Christ. But for the Christians the stereotyping of this Emperor-worship into an instrument of government, and a test of loyalty, created at once a situation of the keenest trial. They who were probably the most law-abiding of all the subjects of Rome, found themselves liable to be branded as traitors and enemies of the State, if they were not prepared to make public denial of their Lord. How much comfort there was, therefore, in the opening words of this salutation, "I know where thou dwellest."

Nothing in their circumstances or situation was hidden from their Lord, nothing of the daily bitterness of life, nothing of the daily struggle to remain loyal to Him.

It is still the fortune of many of Christ's people to dwell where Satan is enthroned. It may be in the midst of the great city, where large sections of the population are more or less openly the servants of sin, more or less openly defiant of God. Or it may be within a narrower circle that men dwell, among fellow-workers, or in a society, or even in a family, where God is forgotten, and the world is worshipped, where loyalty to Christ is interpreted as disloyalty to the conventions of men, or the unwritten code of social intercourse. To His faithful servants in such circumstances the same voice comes from the same Saviour: "I know where thou dwellest, that thou holdest fast my name."

But, even as we hearken to catch these words of comfort, and assurance that we are not alone or forgotten in the midst of the conflict, that greater is He that is for us than they that are against us, we must be prepared to hear the same voice challenging our want of single-minded loyalty to the Lord's ideal, "I have a few things against thee." The shortcomings of the Church at Pergamum were connected with the presence within the community of certain

false teachers whose teaching is again referred to and more fully described in the letter to Thyatira. Reserving, therefore, a closer examination of its character, let it suffice to observe now that this teaching was evidently of the nature of an attack upon the obligation of morality, an encouragement to men to use the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free as an occasion for licence and lust; and further, that while at Ephesus this teaching was firmly repudiated, and in the Church at Smyrna, poor in this world's goods but rich in faith, there seems to have been no trace of it, in Pergamum this teaching had received at least some hospitality, while in Thyatira it had spread to a dangerous extent.

But whether the lapse is small or great, whether the things which Christ has against us are few or many, the summons of His Spirit is ever the same, "Repent." Change your mind about the thing which has drawn you from His side. You were enticed by it because it had a specious attractiveness. See it now as it is, in all its triviality, contemptible, mean, or disgraceful, imperilling your higher life. See it as it is, the thing you have loved and lusted after; and hate it, with something like Christ's hatred of evil. That is what it is to repent, and that is the beginning of final victory.

“To him that overcometh” our Lord in this letter promises that He will give “the hidden manna and a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written.” In trying to discover the meaning of this double promise there is one thing to be chiefly borne in mind, namely, that the meaning of the symbolism must have been perfectly plain to those for whom this letter was prepared. It is in the circle of their ideas and not of ours that we are to find the clue. And each part of the twofold promise appears to have had a different section of the Church in view. Some of the Christians at Pergamum had been Jews, and the clue to the meaning of the “hidden manna” is found in the circle of ideas characteristic of later Judaism. It had been recorded in the book of Exodus that Aaron received a command to take of the manna before it ceased to fall, and “lay it up” in a pot or basket “before the Lord” by placing it before “the Testimony.” In after-times this was understood to mean within the Ark of the Testimony. And one of the favourite legends of post-exilic Judaism was to the effect that before the destruction of Jerusalem the prophet Jeremiah had been instructed to remove the Ark, with its contents, to a place of safety, and that he had carried it off and concealed it in a cave of Mount Sinai. Round this hidden Ark, and the manna hidden with it, the



fancy of the Rabbis played exuberantly; and, amongst other things, they averred that when the long-expected Messiah came the Ark and its contents would be discovered and restored to the holy city, or, otherwise, that manna, which by this time they had come to think of as hidden in heaven, would descend again from above. It was to be one of the glorious privileges of Messiah's reign that His people would be fed on manna. A pious Jew, therefore, who had been nurtured not only on the Old Testament, but also on these later fantasies, would naturally include this among his anticipations of that golden age, that he and his fellow-Jews would partake of the manna which had so long been hidden. It is for such that this part of the promise is specially adapted. Christ always speaks to men in the language that they understand; and here He adopts the form of Jewish anticipation into which He has taught them to put higher and truer contents.

In order that men of other ages and other modes of thought may understand it too, He has given us a key and the power to use it. The key is in St. John's Gospel: "Your fathers did eat the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread, which came down out of heaven." Applying this key, we recognise that



what our Lord promises to give "to him that overcometh" is Himself, and in Himself the God-sent satisfaction of the human heart in all its cravings for light and love. *He* is the hidden manna. And were any one to ask, Why, then, did He not say so plainly? he misses the exquisite tenderness of self-adaptation which is shown in the very form of the promise, adaptation even to the crude and blundering notions of the common folk, who had been Jews but now were Christians. Christ is seen once more clothing Himself in human form, this time in the form of human thought, for the same purpose as at the beginning, that He might give Himself to men.

If, as seems most probable, this is the true explanation of the first half of the promise, we shall not find it difficult to see in the second half an extension of the same principle. Here our Lord condescends to a yet lower circle of ideas, attaches His thought to the common speech of men who had been not Jews but Gentile "heathen" ere they became Christians, and by its means speaks home to their hearts thoughts of eternal truth.

The white stone with a new name has provided a great problem for all the commentators, and the explanations which have been advanced are very numerous. The origin of the symbol has been sought in many directions, in the Urim and

Thummim of the Jewish High Priest, on the stones of which names were inscribed, in the white pebbles with which the Greek jurors gave a vote for acquittal, in the tablet or plaque inscribed with a password which gave admittance to an assembly or banquet. But none of these gives a satisfactory explanation of the name. Once more we must look for light in the circle of popular religious ideas, but in this case, not in Judaism, but in the region where Judaism and Paganism mingled. There we find first of all the habit of attaching mystical and even magical significance to secret names. The knowledge and use of these conferred, according to a widespread superstition, tremendous power over Nature or unseen spirits. And we find, moreover, in the same quarter a particular application of such secret names. They were regarded as passwords, the utterance of which would secure the admission of the soul into one after another of the successive heavens through which it was to ascend to perfect bliss.

There was already in vogue at the end of the first century a system of thought which took the place of religion, produced by a commingling of Judaic and Hellenic ideas, in which this superstition connected with names of power played a great part. This "Gnosticism," as it is called, is of great importance in relation to the early

Church. And Gnosticism from the practical point of view was just a securely patented method of obtaining salvation by learning the various passwords or names of power by means of which the ascending spirit could make sure of entrance into one heaven after another. There can be no doubt that ideas such as these had formed part of the religious furnishing of many minds in Pergamum, some of whom had found a simpler and a surer salvation in Christ. Another line of explanation is suggested by the inscriptions quite recently discovered in Asia Minor by Professor Ramsay. They throw light upon the subject of "Tekmoreian guest-friends," a guild or society the existence of which had been revealed by earlier inscriptions. The "Tekmor" proves to have been not, as was formerly supposed, a name derived from a locality, but a secret password, or sign of membership, which secured entrance to the banquets of the guild. Professor Ramsay is inclined to see in this something which throws new light upon "the mark of the beast," and its use in "exclusive trading." But it is also possible that a reference to the same password or sign underlies the promise here. Whether the name were a name of power to be applied to religious purposes, or a password admitting to social privileges, it would be quite natural that the word should be inscribed upon a stone or plaque. In either case the

possession of the name would be understood to confer great privileges upon the man who received it. In connecting His promise with one or other of these popular ideas our Lord once more clothes His own great gift in forms understood of the people, and thereby contrasts the false with the true. Did others offer to teach mystic signs securing access to social privileges, He would give to His true followers access to the marriage-supper of the Lamb. Did others speak of passwords giving a right to enter heaven, He would give to him that overcometh a surer password for entrance to a truer heaven. Did others promise to communicate the mighty names which caused closed portals to fly back, He would put in His faithful servant's heart the name that is above every name, the name at which every knee must bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth. Was the availing name, which once they had longed to find, a name which each man should have for himself, then Christ would give to him a "new name" in the deep sense of the Bible, a new nature, the real key to the real heaven.

Such appear to be the clues to the true meaning of this promise, and such a foreshadowing at least of its interpretation. If this be so, we have a striking illustration of God's method of dealing with the human mind. He does not stand over

against His children with a complete system of pure truth, which they must rise to, or otherwise accept, before they can enter into fellowship with Him. He incarnates Himself in human thought, as He was once incarnate in human flesh, and for the same purpose, that He may purify it, sanctify it, lead it on to truer truth. As He took certain institutions, such as sacrifice, marriage, the Sabbath, and brought them under the sanction of His command, purified them, made them witnesses and interpreters of higher things; as He took ideas that belonged originally to what we call natural religion, such as Divine Fatherhood, immortality, retribution, and by the power of His Spirit working in men elevated them into intense spiritual convictions, speaking all the time to men in language they could understand, so He spoke to the Church at Pergamum in terms of religious ideas which were already transcended; and so He speaks to us, "having many things to say, which we cannot yet bear," in the language of to-day's needs, of to-day's philosophy, of to-day's religion, but ever summons us to press through these veils in order to find the one unchanging Christ, that when we have finally pressed through the last veil, the flesh, we may find, and find for ever, the unchanging God.

This great promise waits till then for its final fulfilment; but it is made, like all the corre-

sponding promises in these letters, not merely to him that has finally overcome, but “to him that overcometh.” For Christ’s faithful servant there are many preliminary victories, and to each of them is attached its meed of reward—reward in this sort, sustenance and progress and power. As to Christ Himself, when in the wilderness He had overcome, so to His followers faithful though forespent come after their struggles the Ministers of His Grace, to bestow the hidden manna, Christ the Food and Medicine of the soul, and the restored courage of a new name—the name in which He causeth us to triumph. To him that overcometh, *as* he overcomes, to-day, to-morrow, and all the days is this promise made good.



## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA

REV. ii. 18-29

*These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass : I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first. But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess ; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time that she should repent ; and she will not repent of her fornication. Behold, I do cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works. And I will kill her children with death ; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts : and I will give unto each one of you according to your works. But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, which know not the deep things of Satan, as they say ; I cast upon you none other burden. Howbeit, that which ye have, hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations : and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers ; as I also have received of my Father : and I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (R.V.).*



THE letters to the Churches up to this point have revealed a condition of affairs which is, on the whole, satisfactory. Ephesus has cooled somewhat from her first enthusiasm, but cannot tolerate "the works of the Nicolaitans." Smyrna is protected by her poverty from many of the temptations which beset her neighbours. Pergamum has tolerated the presence of some "that hold the teaching of Balaam," and also of some "that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans," but still holds fast the Name, and does not deny the faith. At Thyatira we find a Church which along with much faithfulness and energy of service is more seriously infected with false teaching—a Church in which one of the actual teachers of falsehood occupies an acknowledged and honoured position. It is in harmony with this situation that the tone of this letter is distinctly different from that of the others, more vigorous and authoritative, more threatening in reference to the unrepentant, more eloquent in regard to the victorious.

The town of Thyatira itself was one of little importance in comparison with those which have gone before. It would, indeed, have little or no place in history were it not for the fact that this letter was addressed to the Christian Church there. It was situated about a day's journey to the south-east from Pergamum, on the road

which would naturally be taken by a messenger passing thence to Sardis. With no great natural advantages of position, and no famous history in the past, it was "probably the smallest and feeblest, certainly in general estimation the least distinguished and famous, of all the seven cities." "The local surroundings of Thyatira accentuate this comparatively humble character of its fortunes. It lies in the middle of a long valley between parallel ridges of hills of no great elevation, which rise with gentle slope from the valley. Thus there is a most marked contrast between the situation of Thyatira and the proud and lofty acropolis of Sardis, or the huge hill of Pergamum, or the mountain walls of Ephesus, and the castled hill of Smyrna, each with its harbour, or the long sloping hillside on which Philadelphia rises high above its plain, or the plateau of Laodicea."\* And yet so independent is the Divine mind of such material limitations, that it is to this comparatively obscure and historically unimportant community that the risen Lord describes Himself in terms of the most exalted majesty, and conveys a promise of the most exalted power: "These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass." The two last phrases in the description are taken from the general portrayal of the Son of Man in

\* Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 32.

the first chapter, and are selected doubtless because it is the eyes searching like a flame which detect the evil at work in the life of the Church, and the feet as of a mail-shod warrior, which may be used to crush obstinate resistance to the truth. But in the opening phrase this description goes beyond anything that has yet been enunciated concerning the Son of Man, and openly declares that which, though it could not fail to be inferred, has remained until now a matter of inference. To this Church the Speaker presents Himself in all the fulness of His majesty: "Thus saith the Son of God." Neither does He hesitate to claim in the body of the letter yet another power which, according to the evidence of the Old Testament, was a peculiar attribute of the Almighty: "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." And this revelation comes through the mind of a man who had every national and hereditary reason for doubting and rejecting it. At whatever time in the first century these letters were written, whether at the end or soon after the middle, it is most significant that a monotheistic Jew should thus raise the Jesus whom he had known to the plane of God. It is evidence, all the more remarkable because indirect, of the impression capable of producing nothing less than a revolution of thought, which was made by Jesus on His disciples. Such an impression when once admitted

not only leaves room for, but actually demands, something corresponding to the words and the deeds recorded in the Gospels in order to account for it.

The praise accorded to this Church is once more hearty and appreciative. It specifies even more than is acknowledged of good in Ephesus. There it was the Church's "toil and patience." Here it is its "love and faith, ministry and patience." It may be that the "love and faith" are to be understood as shown toward God, but more probably it is love on the part of the Christians toward one another, and good faith, honour, and mutual loyalty between the members of the Church. It is a noble record of any congregation that God sees these things manifested in their common life, mutual love and loyalty, mutual service, and common steadfastness in bearing the opposition of the world. Where such fruits are manifested love and faith toward God cannot be wanting. And Thyatira goes beyond Ephesus in this also, that there the good work advances. "Thy last works are more than the first."

Wherein, then, does this Church, fruitful as it is in the works of the Spirit, give cause for criticism and incur reproach? The criticism is in this case directed against the tolerated presence, in unusual activity and effectiveness, of that false teaching which, though not unknown

in Ephesus and Pergamum, was by them resisted and rejected. At Thyatira this false teaching was connected with the influence of a woman, a prophetess, to whom the symbolical name of Jezebel is given, to mark the fact that she sought to lead the Church astray, even as Jezebel, in the Old Testament, encouraged Ahab in wickedness. In calling herself a "prophetess," this woman claimed to belong to a recognised class of authorities in the primitive Church. The influence of these Christian "prophets" was only second, if indeed it was second, to that of the "apostles." Their claim to be heard rested upon their possession of "the gifts of the Spirit." There was constant necessity for each congregation to "try the Spirits," to exercise their judgment in detecting false teaching which might be put forward by such teachers. They were most prominent in the assemblies for worship at a time when there was no regularly constituted local ministry, and so long as their claim to speak in the "spirit of prophecy" was admitted, their teaching would be received without demur. But as of old in Israel the responsibility of private judgment was thrown upon the people, and they were summoned to detect the falsity of a prophet if he sought to lead them astray from God,\* so these Christians were

\* See Deut. xiii. 1-3.

expected to discover the false prophet or prophetess, however specious his or her credentials.

The question as to the exact nature of the false teaching which had thus invaded Thyatira and other communities is one of great difficulty. In the letter to Pergamum it is paralleled with "the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." The analogy with the conduct of Balaam applies historically to the second of these charges only. The combination of the two belongs to a much later period, to the controversy which was settled by the "Council of Jerusalem." By the decision of that Council, of which we have an account in Acts xv., these two things were absolutely prohibited to all Christians. And the phrase in verse 25 ("I cast upon you none other burden") being apparently an echo from the finding on that occasion, there seems to be a direct allusion to this controversy.

The question of "meat offered to idols" was still causing considerable difficulty when St. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, and had opened up subsidiary questions which were not covered by the settlement arrived at by the Council. They were questions of the most troublesome kind, because they took concrete form in the



home life of the Christians and the social life of every day. There might be no hesitation as to the duty of a Christian who was aware that the meat before him had formed part of an idolatrous sacrifice ; but how far was he bound to ascertain in every case and in all circumstances whether it was so? St. Paul met the situation with masterly common sense: "He that doubteth is condemned." And were this the only feature by which the false teaching of "Jezebel" is characterised, it might be possible to see here the protest of an austere spirit against what some might regard as culpable laxity, while others saw in it only a just assertion of Christian liberty. The latter might use the arguments, and appeal to the authority of Paul, in defence of a line of conduct which the former might abhor as a weak and cowardly compromise. On such a question, did it stand alone, there might well be two parties, holding with equal honesty to the letter of the precept, but following and recommending very divergent applications of it in practice.

But the reference to "meat offered to idols" does not stand alone. Whatever may have been the precise teaching of "Jezebel" and her followers on this subject, it was conjoined with serious laxity of opinion and teaching upon a question regarding which the Church had never hesitated, on which there could be no debate.



And the allusion to Balaam and his plan to seduce the children of Israel, as well as other language used in the letter, certainly throws the emphasis on this second charge, the charge of encouraging or extenuating licentiousness. Neither is the collocation of the two subjects without its reason in the practices of corrupt Paganism. The heathen temples were notoriously at one and the same time the scene of sacrifice offered to idols, and the home of authorised impurity. There may well have been Christian converts in the Church at Thyatira for whom in earlier days idolatrous sacrifice and gross immorality had been concomitant. They had been delivered from both these things at one stroke through faith in Jesus Christ. It was this inherent relation between idolatry and impurity which the Church had recognised in placing the eating of meat sacrificed to idols and fornication under an equal ban. And the vehemence with which "Jezebel" and her party are here assailed requires no further explanation, if we understand that they were a party who countenanced or advocated any compromise with heathenism and the lusts of the flesh in this direction.

Later writings in the New Testament testify to the presence of the same false teaching in the Church, and to the extent of the danger which it involved. Thus in the Epistle of Jude we read

how "there are certain men crept in privily, . . . turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." The Old Testament parallel on which Jude enlarges is that of Sodom and Gomorrah, which "in like manner with these gave themselves over to fornication"; but he also has Balaam in mind: "Woe unto them! for they . . . ran riotously in the error of Balaam for hire." The parallel passage in 2 Peter\* is still more explicit, and even more sweeping in its denunciation of the Antinomian teaching within the Church. And again this false teaching is connected with the example of Balaam. It is plain that the "destructive heresies" which were privily brought in were not connected with dogma so much as with practice; and their character as pressing the doctrine of Christian liberty to the Antinomian extreme of licentiousness is only too plain. "Forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the hire of wrong-doing." For they entice "those who are just escaping from them that live in error; promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption." A comparison of these and other passages shows that those who were carrying the ideal of Christian life in their

\* 2 Peter ii.

hearts perceived a very real danger lest a considerable section of the young converts to Christianity should be seduced by false teaching of this kind back into "the corruption which is in the world through lust." And no further explanation is necessary of the burning indignation with which these passages are undoubtedly inspired, or of the gravity with which the beginnings of such teaching are regarded in the letters to the Churches.

The possibility that teaching of this kind could be held and inculcated even by those who were within the Church and at the outset meant no evil, is only too abundantly illustrated in the pages of history. Antinomianism was, and is, a very real danger, especially in young communities and among enthusiastic converts. The apostolic declaration, "He that is born of God cannot sin," has been too often interpreted to mean, "Such an one may do what he likes; it is not sin." To us, who have been trained for generations in a sense of true morality, such a doctrine is utterly abhorrent; and to us lacking, as we too often are, in the fresh enthusiasm of experienced redemption, the danger is remote that we should be snared by it. But the danger was both near and serious among this excitable people of Asia Minor, accustomed to go to great extremes in all religious matters. It was not for nothing that St. Paul had argued the question, "What then?

Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" The simplest way of accounting for the severity with which these false teachers, and especially this prophetess of Thyatira, are denounced, is to suppose that they actually taught that as justified by Christ they were free from the obligation of the moral law.\*

At the same time Professor Ramsay is doubtless right, as he is certainly extremely interesting, when he points out that these Churches of the early time were faced by a number of problems of conduct in daily life, in which it was extremely difficult to decide how a Christian should act; and that there was probably a party within them which, without inculcating any such open breach with morality, favoured a line of compromise

\* I find this view of "the false teaching" described as the doctrine of Balaam confirmed by Johannes Weiss in his recent valuable study of the Revelation. He is inclined to accept the reading which makes Jezebel the wife of the "angel," that is, "the leader of the congregation." "Whether 'Jezebel' is the typical or the actual name of the woman, may remain unsettled. In any case she is a member of the Christian community, and not a heathen prophetess operating from without. For the sin, into which she would seduce the servants of Christ, is not apostasy to any kind of heathen cultus, but a form of libertinism on a Christian basis. The watchword of this teaching, that one must know 'the deep things of Satan,' points to a conception and practice of Gnosis and Freedom, such as Paul had already required to combat in Corinth, and such as is attested for Asia Minor by 1 Peter ii. 16." (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 1904, p. 52.)

with the world such as would have been absolutely fatal to the Church. These also may be included in the condemnation passed by these letters; for they seemed "certain to lead to an acquiescence in the commonly accepted standard of pagan society." That such a judgment was right, "no one can doubt who studies the history of Greek and Roman and West Asiatic paganism as a force in human life. That there were lofty qualities and some high ideals in those pagan religions must be frankly recognised. But in human nature the inevitable tendency of paganism was towards a low standard of moral life."\*

And this is the ultimate and not very distant end of unbelief in all its forms. Those who tell us that men can live a moral life without belief in God, because they themselves do so, are men and women who are living upon the moral capital accumulated by generations of believing forefathers. Respect for the great principles of morality may be ingrained in them by tradition; the all-important question is, how far can that respect be transmitted without the belief in God which gave it life and gives it authority? Alas! we need only look around to see. Members of the Christian Church may have their weaknesses, their sins, occasionally their collapse of all morality; but within the pale of faith these

\* Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 339.

things are recognised as such, they are deplored as such, they may be repented of and recovered from. But in those sections of society which have spurned the faith of God, what do we see but selfishness rampant and unashamed, selfishness which has no respect for a neighbour's welfare, or happiness, or honour, when it stands in the way of pleasure or of passion. And we have but to examine our daily newspapers, the records of police and divorce courts, in order to see to what depths of immorality and even bestiality men and women descend, who have begun by rejecting God.

Over all this, whether at Thyatira in the first century, or in England in the twentieth, stands the Son of Man with the eyes of flame and the feet of power, watching to give to each one according to his works—to the wicked and unrepentant the bitterness of death, to the steadfast and self-restrained, grace for grace, and victory for victory. In the description of the fate reserved for the prophetess and her associates, there is probably a grim irony, which would strike the Thyatiran readers more readily than ourselves. The time would come, when, in the very hour of her voluptuous self-indulgence and defiance of God, she would be struck down. "I shall set her on a dining-couch, and her vile associates with her, and they shall have oppor-



tunity to enjoy great tribulation." She feedeth upon ashes. Her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps take hold on hell.

The conflict for the members of the Church at Thyatira who would be faithful to their Lord, was the same in character as that which has to be waged by the members of His Church to-day. He lays on them no other burden than the obligation to observe the moral law, which is proved by the experience of mankind to be for the well-being of society, as well as for the highest good of each individual. The truly moral man asks no other wages but "the wages of going on." Although he asks them not, however, God gives them. As Jesus promised in the parable to the one who had been faithful in his service, "I will make thee ruler over ten cities," so here to the victor in this struggle to keep clear our vision of what is pure, of what is true, and to cleave to what we see, with all the energy of our being, He promises an experience of victory beyond anything we can achieve for ourselves. What may be meant by the gift of "the morning star" is wholly unknown. It conceals some allusion which is lost to us. But the rest of the promise to him "that overcometh" is thrown into a form derived from the second psalm and there connected with the kingdom of the Messiah. It is



nothing less than a share in His own Messianic glory which the Saviour promises to him "that overcometh" and "keepeth my works until the end." In imagery which is drawn in part from the Old Testament, in part from Apocalyptic literature, and in part from the teaching recorded in the fourth Gospel, this great prospect is described, a time when the final victory of righteousness and purity and love shall be made manifest before the eyes of all mankind, when the fact which now we grasp by faith has become plain to sight and sense, that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Then the glory of Him to whom the victory is due, will be not for Himself alone, but that other word will be fulfilled, "the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them."

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

REV. iii. 1-6

*To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. Be thou watchful and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. But thou hast a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches (R.V.).*

IN our study of the earlier letters to the seven Churches, we have learned to recognise the delicate adaptation of the phrasing of each letter to the history, social condition, and the moral atmosphere of the community to which it is addressed. We have found reason to think that the scope of the

writer's knowledge and interest is not confined to the community of Christians who have their home there, a community which was probably insignificant in number, and of yesterday as to date. It is hard to resist the evidence, that both his knowledge and his interest embraced circumstances in the political history of these cities which belonged to a distant past, and characteristics of the population as a whole which imprinted their mark on the life and on the temptations of that section to whom Christ's was the name above every name. In the case of Sardis it appears probable that this delicate adaptation is to the tradition, the history, and the topography of the famous site whereon this Church found itself established, to features in its history which were never far from the consciousness of its inhabitants; and a brief recapitulation of these will be the best preparation for appreciating the letter.

The glory of Sardis had sadly waned by the time when this letter was written; but it was not forgotten. There had been a time when it was the capital of a great kingdom extending over the whole of Western Asia Minor, the first great power with which within historic time the expanding and enterprising peoples of the Greek peninsula came into contact and collision. "Sardis before the middle of the sixth century B.C. was to the Greek colonists of the Ægean

coasts the great city of the East; to them it represented Asia as distinguished from, and more or less hostile to, Europe and Greece. That impression the Asiatic Greeks with their tenacious historical memory never entirely lost. Sardis always was to them the capital where Crœsus, richest of kings, had ruled—the city which Solon, wisest of men, had visited, and where he had rightly augured ruin, because he had rightly mistrusted material wealth as necessarily hollow and treacherous—the fortress of many warlike kings like Gyges, whose power was so great that legend credited him with the possession of a ring of supernatural power.” \* Its immediate neighbourhood supplied the Eldorado of Greek fancy, seeing that the steep bluff on which it stood was washed on two sides by the waters of the Pactolus, which were reputed in legend to roll down gold like sand.

The natural position of the city on this high rocky bluff overlooking the plain of Hermus, and separated by a considerable depression from the mountain range behind, was such as to give it the reputation of being impregnable. On three sides of the city the cliff was understood to be unscaleable; it was only necessary to guard the “causeway,” by which it was connected with other high ground behind; and that could be held by a score of men against thousands. An impregnable city,

\* W. M. Ramsay.

but one which had often been taken—that was Sardis. The first occasion of its capture was one which made a profound impression on memory and on legend.

It was in the sixth century B.C. The army of Crœsus had suffered defeat beyond the Halys, at the hand of Cyrus, and though the victorious enemy followed up his advantage with disconcerting rapidity, and appeared before the walls of Sardis ere a new army could be collected, neither Crœsus nor any of the inhabitants believed there was any danger of his penetrating their impregnable rock-fortress. The only way of approach, along the connecting isthmus, was strongly fortified and carefully guarded. The city slept securely. But accident or treachery revealed to the invaders the possibility of ascending the rock-face by some crack or ledge, the existence of which had been overlooked by the defenders. By this the soldiers of Cyrus clambered up, and Crœsus awoke to find his capital in the hands of the Persians. Cyrus had come upon Sardis “like a thief in the night”; and long afterwards in Greece the fate of Crœsus and of his city served to point the moral of overweening self-confidence and thoughtless security. But even the fact that it had thus become a proverb for foolish confidence did not save Sardis from suffering the same fate again, when some three centuries later

it was captured by Antiochus. Sardis was a city which looked impregnable, but had been taken. And for some time previous to the date of this letter it had been slowly sinking in importance. Out-distanced by its younger rivals, Ephesus and Smyrna on the sea coast, it became a melancholy spectacle, a place of third-rate importance, unable to forget that it had once been chief. Even as a city, Sardis was pre-tentious and self-satisfied, yet moribund, having a "name to live" and yet dead.

The social history of Sardis finds a singularly close reflection in the history of the Church of Christ within its walls, so that the Apostle could point the moral of the one by using language which was suggested by, and suggested, the other. There is first the superscription of the letter. It comes from him "that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars"; the letter to Ephesus was from Him that held in His hand the seven stars, and walked in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. What difference of attitude does the change imply? The "stars" are the heavenly counterparts of the Churches—the lamp-stands the earthly symbols of the same. If for the Church of Sardis the Saviour is no longer walking among the seven lamp-stands, it is suggested that her candlestick has been removed. As a Church she is moribund, a prey



to death. No good works are to be recognised as hers. No "tribulation" can be recorded as having been endured by her with credit, no struggle with false teaching, no stern resistance to false practices. The Church there lived "a ghastly smooth life, dead at heart." Its apparent life was only in appearance. Nevertheless, its death was not absolute or final. Its candlestick may have been removed, but not its star. The jewel by which it was represented was still in the hand of Christ. And He who still holds it as one of the seven stars hath also "the seven Spirits of God." This phrase comes, not like the others, from the description of the Son of Man, but from the Salutation at the opening of the book. It signifies the possession by the Saviour of all the plenitude of Divine energy, but inasmuch as this energy is spoken of as "the seven Spirits of God," it is suggested that there is for each of the seven Churches its own share, its own portion, of this quickening force. Yes, even for Sardis. This Church has indeed a name to live, but it is dead in self-complacency and worldliness. To such a Church it is easy to see why Christ presents Himself as holding still the seven stars, its star not extinguished, but also the Seven Spirits, and so for its benefit a Spirit which maketh alive from the dead.

The body of this letter divides itself differently



from any of the others, the first part being addressed to, and dealing with, the Church as a whole. To the Church as a whole a few sharp sentences suffice to convey a picture of its true condition, counsel, grave even to severity, and a warning calculated to startle even its self-complacency. Its condition was that of death in life. It had all the outward forms of a Church, its meetings, its worship, its organisation, its beneficence; but it had no real life. The symptom which is here singled out as characterising this condition is what we should call slackness, ineffectiveness. "I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God." Works were not wanting; but all alike were branded with incompleteness, perfunctoriness, unreality. There was no heart in them, and the Divine Inspector throws them aside.

The cause of this hollow show of life is suggested by the feature by which some individuals within the Church are marked out as exceptions. They "had not defiled their garments." Apparently the others had; they had not kept themselves "unspotted from the world." How far their weak degeneracy had gone, it is impossible to say: probably not so far as an actual return to the vices of Paganism from which they had been delivered. For in that case the counsel which is here given would have been inadequate

to the situation. The whole tone of this part of the letter seems to point rather to a serious slackening of moral fibre, to an inclination to slur over the distinctions between the standard of Christ and the standard of the world, and to fling away some of the distinctive practices and forms of self-denial which were provided as safeguards of the specifically Christian character. Sardis had been too much for them; its atmosphere of self-pleasing, of self-indulgence, had poisoned the well-springs of their faith, making it sickly, feeble, and ineffective. Instead of their overcoming the world, the world had overcome them. And the result was seen in stains upon their outward life.

Surely this holding up of the mirror of truth before the Church which has at least a name to live, will make it ready to hearken to the grave counsel which follows. This is an exhortation to remember the past, to keep fast hold on what remains, and to repent, or return to the early disposition which had marked their first acceptance of truth. They are to remember with what eagerness they received the gift of God, which is "without repentance," with what joy they heard the Gospel. How often does the Divine summons to men take this form of a call to remember; and how often do we find it, as here, linked with a prediction or promise of the

future. It is indeed the Divine way of dealing with one of the subtlest forms of human evasion, with the disposition to treat life as if it were a series of disconnected experiences, as though a man could wipe out the past by forgetting it, or could destroy the future by ignoring it. Thus men attempt to escape the sense of responsibility at the cost of what gives man his true manhood. For it is the mark of his high position in the scale of being that he is "a thing of large discourse, looking before and after." His powers of memory and of anticipation are among the things which lift him above the beasts; but it is they which also bring with them the sense of responsibility. And for those who are in any sense God's people, memory and anticipation are among the most precious means whereby men can face the present, bear it, control it, make it subservient to noble ends, by referring themselves to great facts in the past and great hopes for the future. "Remember, therefore," how God came to you, how God spake to you, how with a mighty hand He delivered you from ignorance, from hopelessness, from death; how by the life, the death, and the resurrection of His Son, He spoke unto you a gospel which quickened within you life and hope and love. Remember—"Lord, keep our memory green"—and "establish the things that remain," the habits of Christian piety and charity,

the practice of assembling yourselves together, the convictions which even your compromise with the world have not been able to disturb; emphasise these to yourselves; keep fast hold of what you have, *and*—repent. That is to say, recognise that, though at the outset you shaped your course straight towards heaven and God, the currents of the world's life have caught and turned your bark, till now it is drifting, if not speeding, in the wrong direction. Repent, face round, set your course once more towards God.

There is thus a note of wistful urgency even in this address to a Church like that of Sardis, and there is also an implicit promise; for Christ would never call on men to do either what is impossible, or what has not a promise attached to its performance. But it is not on the note of promise, but on that of warning, that this part of the letter closes. Evidently the thread of hope is slender, and the Church of Sardis is warned that if it does not hearken to this counsel, if it does not exchange its attitude of listless security for one of wakeful watchfulness, its fate will be like that of the city of Sardis. The enemy crept in upon the careless city “like a thief in the night,” and as a thief in the night will Christ return against the careless Church, unlooked for, undesired, not for mercy, but for judgment.

But not all the Christians in Sardis fell under

the condemnation which struck the Church. Even there the Lord recognises the presence of a few who are "among the faithless faithful found." And with them the second part of the letter is concerned. There is "a peculiarly kind and loving tone perceptible in this part of the letter." These, who have not "defiled their garments," have kept their purity in circumstances of special trial; and their reward is great, for they shall walk with Christ, be seen in His company, clad in robes whose whiteness proclaims their purity and triumph. The promise to these passes over into a general promise, in which all are included who, like them, strive, and strive successfully, to keep themselves unspotted from the world. It is a promise of life, the same in substance as that given through the Church at Smyrna, but here it is thrown into a new form, that their names shall not be blotted "out of the book of life." The origin of this symbol may be found in the roll or register of citizens of Jerusalem, such as is referred to by Isaiah.\* From this it passes to a roll of the names of God's people kept by God Himself, such as Moses has in view in his prayer, "And if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."† Our Lord uses the same figure, ad-

\* Isa. iv. 3.

† Exod. xxxii. 32; cf. Ps. lxix. 28, and Luke x. 20.

dressing His disciples, when He bids them rejoice, "because your names are written in heaven." The faith of a human heart laying hold of God's grace does establish a relationship which God is slow, very slow, to break or to allow to be broken. His long-suffering with the world is great, but with those who have entered into this relation it is greater far. It is only by some definite decision on our part, which amounts to wrenching ourselves away from God, or by the cumulative effect of prolonged and increasing carelessness—which amounts to the same thing—that we incur this doom of having that name, our name, blotted out, which was inscribed with so much joy. And the names not only stand there, as it were, to be referred to in case of need, but the day approaches when before men and angels each of these names will be openly proclaimed. It will be a day of great surprises, when we discover who among us have been faithful, who have kept their garments from all stain. The wisest judges here will find how much they have been mistaken.

It should not be difficult to realise the effect of the reading of this letter in the hearing of the congregation in Sardis, on some Sunday evening in the second half of the first century. It would strike all as a picture, terrible in its accuracy, of the condition of that Church as seen



by God. Surely it would stir the corporate conscience of that Church to a sense of its imminent danger, due to its want of spiritual life, of true brotherly love, of devotion to Christ its head. It would call out in many, if not in all, the resolve to watch, to watch so as to repel the insidious approaches and attacks of the worldly spirit; to be more faithful and more simple in the discharge of the humblest duties imposed upon them by their Master's will. To some it would give a new sense of responsibility, and even of privilege, involved in the very fact that the atmosphere around them was cold, hostile, even dangerous. They would feel uplifted by the thought that the honour of their Lord, as well as the safety of their Church, was specially entrusted to their care. It would send them forth into the night, determined to be even more loyal, more faithful, more set on overcoming the world, because they felt that the eye of their Master was upon them, that He was not indifferent to any work they might do, or patience they might show, and that each day's victory over the world and self was the pledge of a final victory, of which only eternity would reveal the joy.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.”

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

REV. iii. 7-13

*These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and none shall shut, and that shutteth, and none openeth: I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown. He that overcometh I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven, from my God, and mine own new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches (R.V.).*

WHEN William Penn set out on his great experiment of establishing a Christian and democratic

colony in North America, he gave to the place which was to be its capital the name of Philadelphia. To this choice he was doubtless led, in part at least, by the meaning of the name, "brotherly love"; for that expressed the ideal which he cherished for his colony. But Penn was too good a student of his New Testament not to know that his ideal had been already realised, at least to some extent, within the city of Asia Minor which originally bore the name. Historically as well as etymologically, it was a name of good omen, for the Lord of the Church had caused to be sent to the Christians dwelling there a letter full of appreciation of their worth and service, full also of great and gracious promises.

The character of this Church is indicated at the outset by the aspect under which their Lord presents Himself before its members. "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and none shall shut, and that shutteth, and none openeth." To be holy, is an attribute of the Most High, to have the key of David an attribute of the Messiah, to be true, the Truth, one of the most precious characteristics of Jesus of Nazareth. There are thus summed together, in this description of the Divine quality, the historical significance and the personal character of the

speaker; and each one of these is regarded and presented on its gracious side. Neither reproach, nor warning, nor judgment is called for; and none of them is suggested by the guise which the speaker adopts. "In this respect," says Professor Ramsay, "the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia form a class by themselves. These two Churches are praised with far more cordiality and less reserve than any of the others. They have both had to contend with serious difficulties. The Smyrnæan Church was poor and oppressed; the Philadelphian Church had little power. Before both is held forth a prospect of suffering and trial; but in both cases a triumphant issue is anticipated. Life for Smyrna, honour and dignity for Philadelphia, are promised—not for a residue among the unfaithful, as at Thyatira and Sardis, but for the Church in both cities. It is an interesting coincidence that those are the two cities which have been the bulwark and the glory of the Christian power in the country since it became Mohammedan; they are the two places where the Christian flag floated latest over a free and powerful city, and where even in slavery the Christians possessed cohesion among themselves and real influence among the Turkish conquerors." This salutation, therefore, in which the Lord of the Church presents Himself in one gracious aspect after another is in truest harmony

both with the character and with the future of the Church in Smyrna.

“I know thy works : behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it : for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” The arrangement of the clauses in the Authorised Version is still to be preferred to that of the Revised. Alone among the seven Churches the works of the Church in Philadelphia are acknowledged but not specified. The love, faith, ministry, or patience of the people are left to be assumed. They may be inferred from the special privilege which is granted to the Church, the privilege of a great opportunity. “It is true thou hast but little power, but thou hast kept my word”—and “to him that hath, shall be given”; and so before the Church there stands an open door, one which has been opened by the hand which openeth, “and none can shut.” The meaning of the picture is not obscure. The “door” is not in this case that of entrance into eternal life, nor yet of entrance into God’s kingdom upon earth, but of entrance into a field of successful missionary activity. St. Paul had already made frequent use of the metaphor in this sense. He had told how at Ephesus “a great door and effectual” was opened to him; how similarly at Troas “a door was opened”; and when he bid

the Colossians pray that God may "open unto us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ," he makes plain the meaning: the open door is a free opportunity for propagating the Gospel, for entering with the good news of Christ into the regions beyond.

This privilege was in accordance with the situation occupied by the Church in Philadelphia. It was marked out to be a missionary Church, standing, as it did, in one of the gateways to the central plateau of Asia Minor, through which not only trade and travellers, but also the message of the Gospel, could pass to the nations of the "hinterland"; and to the Christians at Philadelphia was this grace granted that the way to missionary activity lay open before them. It was a reward of their faithfulness in the use of opportunities nearer home; plainly, it was a reward which they would appreciate; and it came to them in a measure which would have been beyond their own power to compass. Christ's own hand had set this door open before them. It was a carrying out of the principle laid down in the parable: "Because thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."

It is a character of noble Christian quality which presents itself elusively yet effectively through the medium of these sentences—a



Christian community not richly endowed with means or members, yet making the most of the opportunities within its reach, eager to let its light shine as far as it could in the circumstances, pained that it could do so little, and having suddenly opened before it, because its Lord knew it was worthy, an opportunity of larger service. Some change in outward circumstances, some alteration in the route of the trade-caravans, suddenly expanded their sphere of influence. It was the Lord's doing, and marvellous in their eyes.

Philadelphia is the Church of the one talent, but of the one talent honestly employed in the Lord's service. It was not discouraged by the fact that its strength was small. And its experience supplies the evidence of what is only to be inferred from the parable, that even the one talent so employed meets with both recognition and reward. Indeed, the wording of the letter suggests that just because our power is but small, the Lord has regard unto it, if only we use what we have, and with His own royal hand throws open the door of new possibilities. This is Philadelphia's crown: the one word of exhortation addressed to her is that she should hold it fast.

The rest of the letter is entirely made up of great promises, three in number: a promise to the Church in view of what it was exposed

to through the hostility of the Jews, another in view of approaching trial, and a third to "him that overcometh."

It is one of the ironies of history that wherever we find the Christian Church during the first century we find it confronted, scorned, and even persecuted, by the Jews. The reason for this was probably political rather than religious in its character. The strongest element in Judaism at this period was its nationalism, to which its monotheism served as a buttress. "The Jews boasted themselves to be the national and patriotic party, the true Jews, the chosen people, beloved and favoured of God, who were hereafter to be victors and masters of the world, when the Messiah should come in His kingdom. They upbraided and despised the Jewish Christians as traitors unworthy of the name of Jews, the enemies of God."\* In fact judgment had fallen upon them, the very judgment which Jesus had predicted, that while they which were blind should through Him come to see, they who thought they saw should become blind. When they turned away from Him they turned away from the light, and specially from the revelation of the Divine Kingdom as a spiritual kingdom, one which transcended all national distinctions; and the religion which had been their strength changed into a

\* See Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 409.

source of weakness, inasmuch as it ministered to their pride. Towards the Christians they were at the best haughty and overbearing, at the worst vindictive and cruel. But it was not to be so always—so this promise runs. Already the situation is reversed before God, and the promise which had been given of old time, that the Gentiles should come and do homage to Israel, now becomes an assurance to the Christians, whether of Jewish or of Gentile origin, that Jews shall come and worship before their feet; and the very thing which the Jews denied shall become too plain to be ignored, namely, that the Christians were indeed the people of God's peculiar choice and favour. So completely has the Christian Church taken the place of Sion, as the Jews have fallen back into the position of the enemies of God. The promises made in the Old Testament to Israel after the flesh are transferred to the new Israel according to faith. And by the same law whereby a door came to be opened before the Christians in Philadelphia another door was closed before the Jews: "From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

The second of these promises is similarly founded upon, and formed out of, the facts of the situation. "Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I, on my side, will do the same

for thee; I will keep thee safe through the hour of trial." Even this faithful and so patient Church may not escape the trial which is to fall on all around. And, like all trials, this will be also temptation, an opportunity, nay, an inducement to "remember the country," the old life, from which they had come forth, and to return. This is the second direct allusion in the book to the approaching sufferings of the Church, the prophecy of which culminates in the thirteenth chapter. It would be a time of testing, of sifting the grain from the chaff. To some it would be an excuse for falling back into the old easy ways of heathenism, of forgetting, if not openly denying, Christ. And even for those who could not entertain such a suggestion for a moment there would be strain on their own faith and patience, and doubt, hesitation, and pain as to many of their brethren. Half the anxiety regarding the anticipated persecution would be gone if men could be sure concerning one another as well as themselves, that all would stand firm. And here comes in the reward of faithfulness in the past, that it is confirmed for the future. "Thou hast kept my word: I will keep thee." The reward of keeping is being kept.

For the Church of to-day the hour of trial does not strike so loudly on the clock of time, neither is the nature of the trial so clearly

defined. But it is before us nevertheless ; in a sense it is upon us. The "world" has learnt wisdom since the days of Rome, and no longer persecutes the Christian disciples with sword and cross ; but he must be strangely insensitive who, being one of Christ's disciples, does not feel in the conditions of modern life "a trial" more subtle, more dangerous, and, to him who purposes to overcome, not less full of pain. Whatever opportunity men had in the first century of glorifying their Lord by "keeping the word of his patience," by enduring and suffering for His sake, or of testing the truth of His promise, we have the same. In the accumulated pressure upon us of the world-spirit, making its arrival by so many channels, in the scarcely veiled hostility of the world to all that seems to us most worthy of devotion, in the attack made on the bases of our faith often under the sanction of great authority, we see, the true disciple feels, "the trial which is come upon the whole world," a trial which is also a temptation. But to the Churches, as to those within the Church who keep the word of His patience, comes this promise, sufficient to quench all anxiety: he that keepeth, shall be kept—by the mighty hand of God.

Then comes the closing promise—"to him that overcometh." The form into which this is thrown is probably connected with features in the

history and the social life of Philadelphia. For one thing, its history as a city was severed into two parts by the occurrence of an earthquake, which not only left all its buildings in ruins, but was followed by a series of earth-tremors so prolonged that the inhabitants began to doubt the stability of the ground on which they dwelt. They lived as a people ready to flee, to quit their city at a moment's notice. To them, as citizens, no greater or more welcome promise could have been given than the assurance that what they builded should stand firm, and that never again would they have to quit their homes for safety. And it is another illustration of the singular adaptation of the contents of these letters to the circumstances of the respective localities, that the Lord's promise to the faithful ones in Philadelphia takes this form of an assurance of perfect stability. He Himself will "stablish" and "settle" them, setting each one "as a pillar" in the house of God, which shall never be shaken or removed. He is to be a pillar, something more than one of the stones of which the walls are composed, an honoured and conspicuous part of the whole fabric. And his place therein is permanent. He has "the living will that shall endure, when all that seems shall suffer shock." "He that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever."



But this position and this permanence are not due to his own determination only, or to his own faithfulness; they are due also to something in God, something *from* God which confirms and ratifies the result of his own victory; and this is expressed in the amplification of the promise, "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the City of my God, the new Jerusalem . . . and mine own new name." Professor Ramsay thinks it incorrect to say that the victor is to receive three names—of God, of the Church, and of Christ; and that "the real meaning is that a name is written on him which has all three characters, and is at once the name of God, the name of the Church, and the name of Christ."\* But in the absence of reasons to the contrary, it still seems best to take the terms of this promise in what appears to be their simplest meaning. The idea of one name which should be at once the name of God, the name of the Church, and the name of the Redeemer, is one difficult to harmonise with the general conception even of an Apocalyptic writer; and for the triple name there is an interesting analogy.† Once more, the form which the promise takes

\* Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 412.

† See Bousset, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 269 (quoting Hirschfeld). Weiss (Bernard) accepts the three names without comment.

may be due to local circumstances. It appears to have been the custom in those towns where there was a temple of the Emperor, that the high priest of that temple, when laying down his office, had a statue of himself erected within the temple precincts, on which were inscribed his own name, his father's name, and the name of his home, as well as the date of his holding office. Visitors to such temples would be familiar with many of such statues by which the memory of these high officials was held in honour. Again, Christ promises to His faithful ones better than the best the world can give. On each of them He will set these names—the name of God, for whose pleasure he was created; the name of the new society of the redeemed, to which he eternally belongs; and the name of Christ, in that revelation of Himself in glory which is necessarily concealed from those who still dwell in the world. What these names were, or are to be, does not matter. According to the well-known significance of the word in the Bible, they express the character of that to which they belong, the character which in some measure has become the possession of those who receive the name.

The promise, therefore, conveys two great assurances. First, that Christ will place on the victor an outward sign by which he will be known

to be God's, not merely because he has given himself to God, but also because God has chosen him, accepted him, sealed him to be His own. This is, indeed, the great discovery which every man makes whose heart goes out in any degree towards God, namely, that his own action is only the middle term between two movements of the Divine Spirit, the first calling him, the second a swift response to the human answer, sealing that act of will. Henceforth it is not on his own faith or faithfulness that his confidence is based; he hath "this seal": "The Lord knoweth them that are his"; or, as the Master said to His disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."

And, secondly, the name itself is a threefold one, defining him that overcometh in the three dominant relations of life, and so holding him in perfect equipoise of moral being. By the Father's name he is claimed and protected as the Father's child. By the name of the city of God he is admitted and declared member of the Divine Society of men, fellow-citizen of the Saints, and partaker of the heavenly inheritance; and by the name of the Redeemer bestowed upon him, he is enfeoffed in possession of the new character, as one who is made in the likeness of Christ.

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"—his calling and his sure reward; his calling to cleave to what is noblest in life, truest in thought, purest

in affection, by cleaving to Christ as his Master, even at the cost of being at issue with the world ; and his reward, to have these things which he knows to be best, nay, to be alone worthy of true manhood, made his for eternity, not alone through his own effort, but by the sealing and confirming will of God.

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA

REV. iii. 14-22

*These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: I know thy works, that thou art neither hot nor cold: I would thou wert hot or cold. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches (R.V.).*

THIS, the last of the letters to the seven Churches, is the letter to the Church which failed, and, strangely enough, this Church was

found in a city which had failed as a city to carry out the function assigned to it. For Laodicea was one of the many towns which were planted or founded in a certain place for the accomplishment of a certain purpose. Like Philadelphia, it had before it an open door, but, unlike Philadelphia, it had made little or no use of its opportunity. The city stood about midway up the long valley-slope along which the great route from Ephesus to the East passed up to reach the central plateau of Asia Minor. It was one of the outpost-gateways between West and East. Such a position confers great advantages, but carries with it also great responsibilities. It secures a steady stream of travellers, merchandise, knowledge, wealth, and thereby the almost certain prosperity of the town which holds it: but man as well as God expects that such a position should be used in order to spread knowledge and influence in the regions beyond. Laodicea had been planted where it was in order to be a missionary city, that it might transmit to the Phrygian highlands beyond it some of those stores of Greek civilisation which flowed into it from the West. But, for some reason or other which cannot now be traced, Laodicea had failed to fulfil its function. In modern parlance, its imports of such things largely exceeded its exports. It grew wealthy, luxurious, ineffective,



and dead. The district beyond it, the country of Phrygia, remained to the end less influenced than any other part of this Hinterland by the Greek spirit, the Greek language, and the Greek civilisation. There is thus a curious correspondence between the history of the city and the character of the Church of Christ within it. It also had failed to fulfil its function. For the Church also had been planted where it was in order that it might let its light shine to those who were in darkness beyond. It had received from the hand of its Founder all manner of favour and benefaction, grace and guidance, wisdom and sanctification. But it failed to pass on the heavenly gifts to others, and so it failed to profit by them. And the cause of this failure was want of enthusiasm, of glad simplicity in the enjoyment of God's goodness, of full surrender to His will. The Church of Laodicea was rich, and comfortable, and well pleased with itself, but sick unto death with indifference.

To this Church comes this letter full of menace and reproach. It opens with a threefold description of Himself, in which the Divine Speaker appears in sharp contrast with the Church which He addresses. It is feeble and vacillating ; He is the Amen, steadfast and immovable. It is uncertain and ineffective in its action. He is "faithful and sure." It prides itself on its con-

nection with things created by man; He is "the beginning of the creation of God," the incipient principle or source of all created being. The aspect in which the Lord of the Church thus presents Himself prepares us for the tone of the letter. The contrast which is immediately felt between His character and that of the community which represents Him in Laodicea already implies its condemnation. And the effect of the consequent judgment was already apparent; for conscience itself had lost its authority, and the Church at Laodicea did not know that it was a miserable thing, poor, and blind, and naked. In such a case time could only make more and more manifest the inward incompetence for life, and, though there is solemn warning here, there is no suggestion that the warning will be taken. The condemnation, so far as the Church is concerned, is absolute.

"I know thy works"; but there is none worthy to be recorded. They are all negative, vain, and worthless in God's sight. There is not even the patience of Ephesus, or the tribulation and poverty of Smyrna; there is no resistance against false teaching, no love, good faith, or ministry, nothing which the searching and wistful eye of the Master can put down to the credit of this Church. It has taken from God all that it knew how, and it has kept it all to itself. The condemnation is therefore unqualified, and it rests

not upon the absence of the proper works, but on the temper or character to which that absence is due. "Thou art neither cold nor hot." The adjectives, particularly that rendered "hot," are such as are peculiarly suited to water; and the figure in the following verse is based upon the nauseating effect of water which is neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. The condition represented by the word "cold" is the extreme opposite of the spiritual fervour and zeal signified by "hot"; it is something more than mere "spiritual coldness." What we understand by that was precisely the condition in which the Laodiceans were found, a condition of lukewarmness to which entire extreme would have been preferable. "I would thou wert cold or hot." The principle underlying such a statement is the fact of observation recorded in the Gospel, "Verily I say unto you (the priests and religious leaders of the people), that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you." In the religious history of many the dawn seems to be the enemy of the day. Better than a comparative warmth, with which a man is apt to rest content, would be the absolute cold which would impel him to seek the Sun of Righteousness. So it was with this Church. The inner fire was wanting, whereby the gifts and grace of God, together with the opportunities of life,

might have been fused and transmuted into works precious in His sight and beneficent to all around. The talents entrusted to it lodged with it useless; and the reason was that it had taken the gift of God in a grudging and unthankful spirit. It had doubtless all the outward marks of a Church, the officers, the stated worship, the prayers, hymns, and preaching of the word, but—

“Ah! its heart, its heart was stone,  
And so it could not thrive.”

The truth, which both Churches and the individuals of which they are composed are always in danger of forgetting, is that God looks for love from those whom He has redeemed, and for those signs by which love naturally expresses itself. We recall how the Risen Christ searched the heart of Peter in order to draw out the expression of that love; how in earlier days He had reproached the Pharisee for the absence of all tokens of sincere affection (“Thou gavest me no kiss”), and tenderly confirmed the lavishing of such tokens upon Himself by the hands of the penitent woman. In these signs and in the love they signified He saw the proof that her heart was truly melted before God, that the Divine grace of forgiveness had reached her. And so, the expression of dislike and contempt so rare with

Him, is reserved for those who are "neither cold nor hot," who are warmed, as it were, by others' fires, and have no love-fire of their own. That they are not fervent in their love hinders His joy and their fruitfulness; that they are not cold checks His compassion and their sense of need. "No heart is pure that is not passionate, no virtue safe that is not enthusiastic." The Church at Laodicea fell under the condemnation of those so bitingly described by Dante: "This miserable doom they bear, of those wretched souls that lived without incurring infamy or deserving praise, mingled with the caitiff crew of angels who were neither rebels nor loyal towards God, but stood for themselves alone."

This temper of self-protecting caution, which will not commit itself wholly even to God, both springs from, and further ministers to, melancholy self-deception. Between the soul that is not cast on God and the true basis of life and well-being there is still space for the intrusion of other grounds of confidence. In Laodicea these were found in the abundance of the things of this world. The self-satisfaction of the Church there was due in the end to the fact that it was rich, could provide itself with all it wanted, and meet all claims—but the claims of God. For riches are a snare to a community no less than to an individual. The Church at Smyrna was poor,

and poor in the midst of a wealthy city. Its members may have looked not seldom with envious eyes upon the easy circumstances of the sister-Church at Laodicea. But see what a letter Smyrna received from her Lord, and compare it with this to Laodicea! And yet it might have been otherwise. The grace of God is sufficient not only for the poor, but also for the rich. Had Laodicea refused to be misled by her outward prosperity, had she known her true need, misery, and nakedness, there was One who had been able to supply even her need, to heal even her misery. It would have been a strange prayer, and yet would it not have been a wise one, "O Christ, have mercy upon us, for we are a wealthy Church"?

Whether there was still a chance of such becoming the prayer of the Church at Laodicea, we cannot tell. But counsel is given to it as though there were. And the counsel is blended of irony and kindness. The irony lies in the allusions, obvious enough to the first readers of the letter, to things for which Laodicea was famous, the very things on which its inhabitants prided themselves. In the first place, it was a great commercial and financial centre, famous for its banking and exchange. When it was visited by Cicero in B.C. 51, he carried with him bank drafts to be cashed there, and its prosperity and



banking facilities had not diminished in the interval. Laodicea was renowned also for its manufacture of fabrics, the materials for which were supplied by the glossy black fleece of a particular breed of sheep, and for outer garments fashioned of this fabric. To have a cloak from Laodicea was like being dressed in Russian furs. Naked indeed! There was no one more comfortably dressed than the people who went to that church. And there was a third thing for which the city was famous—its medical school. Its physicians were disciples of a particular pharmaceutical principle according to which what were called compound diseases required to be treated with compound medicines; and they prided themselves on the combinations of drugs which they had invented. Galen refers to a special kind of ointment which was originally prepared only in Laodicea; and there was also a medicine for the eyes which is described as Phrygian, Phrygian stone, or Phrygian powder, and was exported to all parts of the Greek and Roman world. And, strangely enough, these medicines were commonly made up in the form of a small cylinder of compressed powder, the technical name for which was “Kollyrium,” the same word as is used in verse 18 and translated “eyesalve.”

We can now perceive both the irony and the

kindness of the counsel to the Church which dwelt in this city. These are the things on which you pride yourselves, the wealth which is stored in your banks, the dark glossy garments in which you are dressed, the world-famous medicines by which you profess to cure all manner of diseases. But if you knew what is the true riches, true clothing, true health, you would come to Me, and seek them from My hand. Your banks and wealthy money-changers can give you only the gold which perisheth: I give the gold which is current for eternity. Your richest clothing leaves you naked and ashamed before God; I have the garment of righteousness to give, in which even he that hath been a sinner may stand before God, and not be ashamed. Your physicians offer a cure for everything, but there is a blindness which they cannot cure. It is Mine to cure that, to remove the blindness that prevents men from seeing "the King in his beauty, and the land that is far off." In a word, whatever the world offers, to make men easy and comfortable in the life that is now, Christ offers something that corresponds to it in kind, but is real, transcendent, and adequate to the needs of man as a creature of eternity.

Whether the Church at Laodicea was still able to hear what was said unto it by the Spirit, to accept and act upon this counsel, we have no

means of knowing. There is something in the tone of the letter which disposes us to think not. It recalls the tone of such sayings as "Ye would not come unto me, that ye might have life." And the picture of the Church which it suggests is one of "ghastly, smooth life, dead at heart," to which an offer such as this would only too likely be made in vain.

This is not, however, the whole of the letter, and what follows furnishes striking and welcome evidence of the pertinacity of the Divine compassion. Thwarted and rejected, as it seems to have been by the Church as a whole, it turns with exquisite tenderness to the individual member of that Church, and for him the letter which opens so sadly closes with a new prospect of hope and victory.

Professor Ramsay regards these last verses (20-22) as not forming part of the letter to Laodicea, but rather a general epilogue to the whole series. By this means he eliminates what seems to him a difficulty, viz., that "after the extremely sharp condemnation of Laodicea, it seems hardly consistent to give it the honour which is awarded to the true and courageous Church of Philadelphia alone among the seven, and to rank it among those whom the Author loves." But this difficulty is more simply removed if we recognise that at the beginning of verse 20

the Author turns from the Church to the individual, in this case anticipating the transition, which in the other letters is marked by the promise to him "that overcometh." And to let the letter to Laodicea break off at verse 19 is to leave it too obviously a fragment, destroying the symmetry which is so marked a characteristic of the whole series by supposing that this letter alone was sent without any promise to him that overcometh, and without the closing rubric, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

"Behold, I stand at the door" of each individual heart in this Church at Laodicea, "and knock" there. It is in entire accordance with the whole tenor of the Gospel that right here, where the condition of the community is most sad, the gracious interest of God in the individual should be most emphatically expressed. The corporate life has ceased to be the medium of true Christian experience, the instrument of fellowship with Christ. But the individual need not for that reason miss the experience or lose the fellowship. Rather does he become the object of the Master's special care; and to him is offered a fellowship of a specially personal and intimate kind. "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Thus the most gracious invitation, and also the most glorious promise, are addressed to those Christians for whom the conditions of spiritual life were most difficult. To a humble disciple of Christ it might be put thus: Supposing you found yourself forming part of a community to which such a letter as this could, or ought to be, addressed; if there seemed to be neither life nor love in the professing Christians round you, if you felt that they must needs fall under the condemnation of this letter, and you with them, then with what urgency of Divine tenderness would this closing message come home to your heart! The Church may be "dead," but if there is one within its doors who can hear the voice, if there be one who will arise and open, then this promise is for him. The Christian fellowship which I seek may be hollow, or cold, or non-existent, but here is One who offers to come in, even to "the bare lodging of my soul," to be my Guest and to make me His, to spread before me all I need for the soul's nourishment and peace and joy. Those around me may seem to have given up the struggle. They neither achieve nor seek victory over self and the world. Am I so entangled and identified with their failure, their indifference, that I must needs partake in their rejection, their condemnation? This promise says, Nay. We are "members one of another,"

but we are also in individual touch with God. I need not, I must not, be dragged down by my surroundings. My Master calleth me by name, singles me out with personal recognition, offers me His personal fellowship. And to him "that overcometh" in circumstances such as these is made a further promise of unexampled privilege: "I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne." One who has so deeply identified himself with Christ in the disappointment, the sorrow, the pain, prepared for Him by such a Church as that at Laodicea, shall equally be identified with Him in the glory which He receives of the Father.



## THE VISION OF THE THINGS THAT ARE

REV. iv., v.

THE kernel of the Book of Revelation is probably to be found in the Vision of Judgment which begins with the opening of the sealed book in the sixth chapter, and ends with the pouring of the bowls in the sixteenth. The chapters which precede this central section are intended to prepare for it by preparing the minds of the readers of the book for these predictions of judgment; the chapters which follow contain, for the most part, the elaboration of one or other of the elements in the Vision of Judgment. After the introduction proper, contained in the first chapter, the letters to the seven Churches have served to arrest the attention, to quicken the conscience, and to confirm the steadfastness of these individual communities of Christ's people, while at the same time indicating both the weaknesses and the opportunities of the Universal Church. Already, the way seems open

for the detailed description of the "tribulation," the "hour of trial which is to come upon all the world," the unfolding of the impending Judgment. But there remains something still for the Apostle to do; and that is to unveil the heavenly and eternal background, in front of which these coming events are to be transacted; and to this he addresses himself in the fourth and fifth chapters.

In these wonderful chapters he describes, under the form of a vision, two different but closely related scenes in heaven. Each scene is full of rich and suggestive details; but these we pass over lightly in order to show the meaning of these scenes as separate but related wholes, their relation to the Book of Revelation as a whole, and the relation of what they describe to human life as a whole.

The fourth chapter relates how the Apostle in a vision saw, as it were, a door opened in the sky, through which he passed at the summons of a trumpet-clear voice, bidding him "come up hither." And, being "in the Spirit," translated on to the plane of the Eternal, he beholds, at one glance, a scene corresponding to that which had been seen and described by the great prophets of old, by Isaiah and by Ezekiel—the heavenly court of the King of Kings, in the centre the Almighty, high and lifted up, throned above

all worlds, veiled in light unapproachable, yet known, His presence scintillating with the brilliance of the diamond, glowing like a cornelian, with the concentrated redness of a furnace, and yet overarched with fresh and living green as of an emerald. Blinding brilliancy, the glow of a consuming fire, the soft radiance of rainbow promise, these were the contrasted elements in the impression made upon the Seer by the vision of "him who sat upon the throne."

On either side of the throne he saw twelve other "thrones" coming forward so as partly to enclose a space in front of it; and on these were seated the four-and-twenty "elders," as they are called. There has, of course, been much discussion as to what kind of beings we are to understand by these "elders," or whom they represent. To see in them the Patriarchs and Apostles, or the Prophets and the Apostles, is tempting but not possible. For they are not beings of earthly, but of heavenly, rank. They are of the order of angels. From Isaiah (xxiv. 23) we learn that this name of "elders" was in fact given to certain angelic beings, who seem to have been regarded as a kind of Divine consistory assembled in the presence of God. The idea reappears in one of the Jewish Apocalypses, where we read, "They brought before my face the elders and the rulers of the order of the

stars"; and it is probably illustrated by St. Paul's reference to "thrones and dominions" among the "things invisible." What the Seer beholds, therefore, is not the representatives of any earthly Church or order in the Church, but a group of angelic beings whose presence in the heavenly court was part of the ancient Jewish tradition on the subject.

The case is similar with the four "living creatures." They correspond with the four "cherubim" in the vision of Ezekiel. They are the personification of the forces set in motion by the will of God, whereby His throne is supported, His authority maintained. Their distinguishing characteristic is in their eternal watchfulness, their sleepless observation of all that transpires in heaven or on earth. "Full of eyes before and behind," they observe and reflect on all sides the Divine majesty of Creation.

Like the foregoing, the rest of the imagery of this scene is drawn from various passages in the Old Testament. The "lightnings and voices and thunder" were heard in connection with the great Theophany at Sinai, when the Law was given to Moses. The "glassy sea as of crystal" goes back to the account of the Creation in Genesis, and the "waters above the firmament" which separate the created world from

heaven, a conception which was symbolised in later times by the "molten sea" of the Temple. It matters not whether all these details actually impressed themselves on the mind of the Seer as he beheld the vision, or whether the essential part of the vision, God in His unapproachable glory as Creator, came naturally, as he afterwards described it, to be clothed in forms of thought and of language which had been hallowed by the tradition of centuries; the effect, if not the purpose, of the details is to enrich the picture, to intensify the impression of the Divine glory as John beheld it, and to explain the source of the great hymn of praise which is the climax both of the vision and of the chapter.

For the four "living creatures" rest not day nor night from the great chant in which, as representing all His works, they hymn the glory of Almighty God. And whenever the cadence of their song reaches its rhythmic change, the four-and-twenty representatives of the angelic host repeat their worship, "casting their crowns before the throne," and add their song: "Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created." This last sentence at once gives us the burden of their song, and prepares us to find it supplemented, as it is in the

following chapter. It is a hymn of praise to the Creator, offered by creatures or beings wholly of heavenly origin and unsullied purity. "They think of Creation and its wonder, of the heavens which declare God's glory, and the firmament which shows forth his handiwork; of sun and moon and stars in their manifold and resplendent glories; of the mountains and the valleys; of the rivers and the fountains of waters; of the rich exuberance of life in all its forms from the tiniest animalcule up to the noblest creature, man. Their thought penetrates to the almost infinite abysses of space, and finds there the like evidence of the power, the wisdom, and the majesty of God." How often has the impulse to echo this hymn come to us as we stood beneath the high-vaulted sky of night, "thick inlaid with patines of bright gold," "when Hesperus with the host of heaven came."

The powers and privileges of such angelic beings as we here read about are beyond our ken; but let us suppose that they include a knowledge of the wonderful works of God in all places of His dominion as minute as our knowledge of this single world, and we shall not wonder if the spectacle of His creative power is such as to fill their life with ceaseless praise.

But there is one note in the complete octave of praise which is not sounded in this chapter,



one instrument which is missing from this orchestra of praise. The voice of man is not heard in this song; and with all its richness and fulness we listen in vain for the note of love, of joy in the mercy as well as the power and glory of God. These follow in the fifth chapter, and that is the reason why they are rightly studied together; these two chapters are not only counterparts the one of the other, the second is needed to complete the first. To the description of the eternal adoration of the Almighty as the Creator is now added a description of the adoration of the Lamb as Redeemer. But both Creation and Redemption have a future as well as a past. He who created all things "according to his will" is yet to make new heavens and a new earth. And so He who has already purchased men to God has still a work to do in the application of redemption to human history. The future is under the hand of Him that once was slain, and the token thereof is that He alone has the power to open the Book which contains its secrets.

The scene described in the fifth chapter is once more described as beheld by the Apostle under the conditions of a vision. The details are not such as can be followed or understood under the conditions of waking life or fitted into one stable picture. They all combine to convey and in-

tensify one impression, the right and claim of "the Lamb," and of "the Lamb" alone, to the control of the future. The Apostle sees lying on the hand of the Almighty the Book wherein are written the judgments of God, "the things which are to be hereafter." On the unsealing of this Book and the revelation of its contents depends the possibility of counselling and encouraging in advance the trembling Churches of Christ; and the heart of the Seer is heavy as he realises that even in heaven no one can be found who is worthy to open the Book. The encouragement which is thereupon offered to him by one of the angelic powers is couched in the phraseology of Jewish expectation of the Messiah: "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof." But when the promised figure of the One who is worthy appears He is seen under the figure of a Lamb, a Lamb "as though it had been slain," slain in sacrifice, as the word suggests. The Word and the Lamb: these represent the aspects of Christ's person and work which are characteristic of the Fourth Gospel, and it is important to observe that in this book, which claims to be by John, and here alone outside the Fourth Gospel, He appears as the Lamb and as the Word.

In the action of the scene which follows, we

may perceive how freely the Apostle handles the figures which form his picture or fill his vision. The "Lion of the tribe of Judah" is the Messiah; the "Lamb" is the Redeemer who once was slain. The two figures, sharply contrasted as they seem, coalesce, melt into one another, and all the while present Him whom they symbolise, Christ Jesus the Saviour. The forms into which the thought is poured are all so plastic, so filmy, and symbolic in their quality that it would be wholly false to the Apostle's method to force a literal meaning upon the details. And yet for that very reason what lies behind and below the forms seems by contrast only the more solid and substantial because of their fluidity. We see the like in Nature, when standing for hours on some Alpine slope we look across the valley to where some peak rises fourteen thousand feet into the sky, and see only hints of its great shape through the clouds which cling about it, suggesting yet refusing to disclose its form. The impression of that peak's solidity and majesty is only enhanced by the fleeting, changing garments in which it is encased whenever a rent in the cloud-covering reveals the solid fact which gives all the scene its character. In like manner these elusive, changeful symbols which are flung over the central figure of this scene only enhance its majesty and imposing power, when at the last

it stands fully revealed in the burst of universal praise with which the chapter closes.

This is the fact of Redemption through the Lamb that was slain. It is this that makes Him worthy, when none else could be found worthy, to open the Book; it is due to this that the future of God's people is in His hand. "Worthy art thou, for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation; and they reign upon earth." Even in the midst of the tribulation which impends they will still be "kings," reigning royally over life through "him that loved" them.

This song breaks first from the lips of the heavenly host, from the four living creatures, and the four-and-twenty "elders"; but it is caught up by voices which have not been heard as yet. Created things not only in heaven but also on earth add their harmonies to swell this song. For now, through the salvation which has been wrought by the Lamb, a place has been made for them along with the unfallen angels, the beings unstained by sin; and the theme of their rejoicing worship is not the Redemption only, but to that they add the Creation too, which in the preceding chapter had been hymned by the angels alone. The worship which these had offered "to him that sitteth upon the throne," and the worship which is offered by earth and heaven

to the Lamb, now flow together in one stream. All God's creatures join to sing the double Hymn of Creation and Redemption, wherein the glory of God is complete. "Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever."

It is not difficult to understand how human language, even the language of an inspired man, breaks down in the attempt to depict such a scene as this. And it is not a little significant that in each of these chapters the situation becomes clear, the meaning of the vision steals into our hearts, when we hear the burst of praise. Is not this the reason why praise forms so important a part of worship, not only that it is our due to God, but that it is the vehicle for expressing, and so of realising, thought and emotion which lie too deep for words, "fancies which break through language and escape," high pulsations of triumphant joy, for which the utmost that words can do is to lend them wings?

The glory of God the Creator, "upholding all things by the word of his power," that is the fact revealed to John in the first of these visions, and revealed with blinding splendour. The glory of Christ the Redeemer, who has made of His people "a kingdom and priests upon earth," that is the fact revealed in the second vision, revealed with

overwhelming power. Now, what purpose did these visions serve in the work to which John was appointed, and why does he record them just here? The answer is that these two facts form the background of all history, and it is in the presence of these facts that all events on earth can alone be properly understood. It would be well, indeed, if we could find a better word than "background"; and in using it we must be careful to avoid all suggestion that what stands there is of inferior importance. Rather are these the unchanging facts, in the presence of which the changing scenes of human life and history are set. These are the facts against which all other facts have to be viewed in order to know their true meaning and to appraise their just value.

That being so, it is easy to see the importance of these chapters for St. John's immediate purpose. He is about to unroll the book of destiny, to describe its contents, the judgments, the woes, the chastisements, which are to fall upon the dwellers on the earth, the trial and tribulation that await even the Church of Christ. And before these things are revealed to him, he is allowed to see, before they are related by him, he describes—these twin scenes, the things that are, things which must so profoundly affect men's judgment on the things that come to pass. It is as though the Apostle felt that his readers would



be able to look forward without a quiver of dread to the times of suffering and of sifting which were at hand, if only they could share with him the glorious conviction of the things that are, the all-pervading and all-ruling power of the Almighty, and the all-embracing, all-uplifting power of the Redeeming Lord.

And what was put here to serve a special purpose, stands here to meet a general need. The clouds which hang over human life, half conceal and half reveal forces which are full of threatening and of dread. He who tries to peer into the future of his own life, or of the life of nations or the world, may see such things as John foresaw—wave upon wave of trouble, forces of evil raising themselves to gigantic power, confusion and distress among the people of God, the possible falling away of many, a struggle between good and evil culminating in a very Armageddon. And yet he may face it all without trepidation, if only he has seen the vision of John in Patmos, if he has been able to join in these great songs of praise.

That great song of Creation, the song which has never ceased since the first day that "the morning stars sang together," is one in which we men are not qualified to take part until we have learnt to join triumphantly in the song of Redemption. But when we have beheld in the Lamb of

God, "slain from the foundation of the world," the one through whom God is pleased to reconcile the world unto Himself, when ourselves partaking in that reconciliation we are made kings and priests unto Him, then opening is made even for us men in that vaster choir, of those who because they see in all created life the working of one supreme and holy Will, see human life as it is, human life with all that threatens it, human life with all that limits it ; and yet, "rest not day and night saying, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty."

## THE SEALS, THE TRUMPETS, AND THE BOWLS

REV. vi.-xvi.

THE writer's preparation for the ushering in of his vision of Judgment is now complete, and we come to what was in all probability for himself and for his first readers the central and most important part of his Apocalypse. His great purpose is to depict the impending judgment of God upon mankind in its certainty, its nearness, and the stages of its progress ; and so on the one hand to warn the unbelieving and the wicked, and on the other to encourage God's own people to unabated patience and confidence under the trial to which they are to be exposed. The contents of the foregoing chapters, important as they are, and precious to ourselves, have yet their primary value for the earliest readers in this, that they set them in a right position from which to judge what follows, not only as it stands predicted here, but as it shall unroll itself in their experience. The first chapter has set forth the occasion of the prophecy, and the

authoritative source from which it proceeds. The second and third chapters have served their special purpose in bringing both comfort and admonition to the Churches of the Province, comfort in so far as they know now how precisely their Lord envisages their situation, how tenderly He is touched by their distress and trial, how completely His promises fill every hollow of their need—admonition, in so far as, searched by His word, they have recognised the various shortcomings in their faith and practice, the danger, to which both individually and corporately they are exposed, of allowing the distinction between themselves and the world to be obliterated, and so of being swept away by the coming storm of judgment. In chapters four and five there have been revealed to and through the Apostle the great facts of Creation and Redemption, which form, as it were, the background against which the coming events in time are to be viewed. The spectators have been prepared; the all-important background has been set; and now the drama of Judgment begins.

For convenience of examination it may be described as a drama in three acts—the first a series of judgments following on the opening of the seven seals, the second a series following on the blowing of the seven trumpets, and the third a series following on the pouring of the seven bowls. The description of these successive series is dis-

tributed over several chapters, beginning with the sixth and ending with the sixteenth. But within these chapters there are inserted three passages which are best understood as "parentheses," which break the continuity of the judgment series. The first of these occupies the seventh chapter, the second, chapters ten and eleven down to the thirteenth verse, and the third, chapters twelve to fifteen. The meaning and purpose of these parentheses does not concern us just now. It is sufficient to observe their presence and their parenthetical character. If the reader passes over these chapters for the present, he finds that the drama of Judgment unrolls itself steadily and continuously before his eyes.

It is the Lamb who opens the seals. The key of all the future is in the hands of Christ, in that special aspect of His character and His work which is represented by the Lamb, His self-offering to God on behalf of men, His will to redeem mankind undeterred by their sin or His own immeasurable pain. The Father "hath committed all judgment to the Son," "hath given him authority to execute judgment"; but the hand that opens the seals which mark the stages of judgment is the hand which was nailed "for our advantage on the bitter cross." While men can see the Agent of Judgment under the form of a Lamb, they still behold the Saviour in

the Judge ; and till the final judgment has passed there is room for men to repent, to "see one instant and be saved."

The Seer beholds in his vision how the opening of the successive seals is followed by successive strokes of judgment which fall upon the earth and its inhabitants. The first four of these strokes of judgment are symbolised by the appearance of the four horses and their riders. These are summoned one after the other by one of the four "living creatures," "saying as with a voice of thunder, Come." As to the meaning to be attached to these four riders, there is no difficulty or question except in regard to the first. This has been taken by some to represent the Lord Christ Himself (or some representation of Him) returning as a victor, "conquering and to conquer." But it is not here, at the commencement of the long series of judgments, that we can find room for His appearance ; it is not until the nineteenth chapter is reached, when the cycles of anticipatory judgments are complete, that we are to find Him whose "name is called the Word of God" coming forth to victory attended by "the armies of heaven," and with many crowns upon His head. Neither is it compatible with even the Apocalyptic freedom of handling images, that Christ should be presented at one and the same moment as the Lamb who



opens the seals, and the rider who appears in consequence of that opening, if not out of the book itself. In view of these objections it has been suggested that this first rider represents not Christ Himself, "but only some symbol of His victorious power, the embodiment of His advancing kingdom as regards that side of its progress when it breaks down earthly power, and makes the kingdoms of the world to be the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ."\* But even for a figure with this meaning there seems to be no proper place here in advance of, and in closest connection with, the judgment of destruction upon wickedness. The clue to the correct explanation lies not in the "white horse" and its supposed connection with the "triumph" of a Roman general, which rests upon a mistake, but in the "bow," which is the most characteristic feature about this first rider. He represents Invasion, victorious invasion of the Roman Empire, on the part of a particular nation, the Parthians, who were famous for their skill as bowmen, and whose growing power on the Eastern frontier was a just cause of alarm. "The Bowman sitting on a white horse, to whom a crown was given, is the Parthian King. The

\* So Alford, with whom agree Hilgenfeld and Zahn ("A Presentation of the Victorious Course of the Gospel"), and, more recently, Bernhard Weiss.

bow was not a Roman weapon ; it was not used in the Roman armies except by a few auxiliaries levied among outlying tribes, who carried their national weapon. The Parthian weapon was the bow ; the bowmen were all horsemen ; and they could use the bow as well when they were fleeing as when they were charging." The colour of the rider's horse corresponds with this interpretation. For "white had been the sacred colour among the old Persians, for whom the Parthians stood in later times ; and sacred white horses accompanied every Persian army."\*

The first rider, then, represents Invasion, by this terrible and ruthless people from the East, putting fire and slaughter through many lands. The second, mounted on a red horse, is War, the outbreak of civil conflict within the Empire itself. The third, who rides a black horse, and carries scales in his hand, is Famine, dearth so terrible that the utmost a man can earn by a whole day's labour is only enough to keep himself, and leaves nothing for those dependent on him ; dearth of that peculiarly horrible kind which mocks men by the abundance of what are by comparison luxuries, while the necessities of life are not to be had. There is abundance of oil and wine ; but bread is a shilling a loaf. The fourth rider, bestriding a horse of livid grey, is Death,

\* Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 58.

followed by Hades, or the Grave, the black pestilence which treads hard on the heels of Famine, mowing down its helpless victims, and the insatiable Grave which gathers them into itself. Thus, the judgments here predicted follow very closely the course of events indicated by Christ Himself—"wars and rumours of wars," "famines and pestilences." But these things are the "beginnings of travail," the "woes" which precede the Lord's return, the birth-pangs out of which the new creation is to issue.

The opening of the fifth seal ushers in what appears to be a distinct group of judgments, and reveals a distinction among those who suffer by them. We behold the martyrs for the cause of God awaiting the consummation of their felicity, represented as impatient for the hour of recompense to strike, and bidden to wait yet a season, until their number be complete. In other words, among those who are being racked and slain by Invasion, War, Famine, and Pestilence, and being swept up by the Grave, there are some, they may be few, they may be many, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, whose souls also have to pass into God's keeping; and when the tale of these is complete, then the measure of heavenly felicity will be completed too. The solidarity of the Church, of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven, is so real

that their experience of blessedness lacks something until our warfare also is accomplished.

The sixth seal brings us to the climax; it is concerned with the things which immediately precede "the end," or that which has all the appearance of the end. The events which it ushers in, the earthquake, the darkening of the sun, the shaking of the constitution of Nature, are reproduced almost in the same words from our Lord's prediction in the Gospels: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven." These are the things which immediately precede the end.

But there is a seventh seal; and when that is opened, there is first of all a silence in heaven. That the duration of this silence is fixed at "half an hour" simply means that it lasted for a broken and indefinite period. It suggests the tremendous uncertainty, the strained eagerness with which the end of the silence is awaited, especially by the Seer. It is plainly a silence big with fate, conveying, as nothing else could do, the impression of agonised suspense. The "lightnings and voices and thunders" cease: even the music and the praises of heaven seem to cease; the whole

innumerable multitude of heavenly beings are intent to see what shall come. Will it be indeed the end? There is "a stillness so absolute, that the whole scene seems laid for the sudden signal which never comes to change and end it."

For when we look for the end to come, behold, seven angels stand forth, with seven trumpets, and with the blowing of these trumpets a new series of judgments begins. We shall have to consider immediately what is the nature of the relation between the first and the second series, and also the third. Meanwhile, we have to observe the particular judgments which are heralded by the successive trumpets. A comparison with the narrative in the Book of Exodus will show that they correspond very closely with the successive plagues which fell upon Egypt and the obstinate Pharaoh. Hail and fire, water turned into blood, rivers poisoned so that men die of drinking their waters; darkness through the cutting off of the sun's light—these judgments correspond in character with the plagues of Egypt, though they are heightened in effect by being made universal. Once more, the fifth and the sixth of the series usher in events which differ somewhat in character from those immediately preceding. As the fifth seal opened a vision of heaven and the souls of the righteous, so the blowing of the fifth trumpet unstops the

mouth of hell, the shaft which, according to ancient cosmogony, was supposed to lead down through the earth into the abyss. Out of this comes pouring a dense cloud of insect-like creatures, equipped and prepared for the torment of men. In the description of this judgment-stroke we may see a combination of the plague of flies in Egypt, and the imagery of the famous passage in Joel, where the army of invading locusts is described;\* only in the Apocalypse every feature is heightened by the hellish origin of the plague.

The sounding of the sixth trumpet is the signal for something like that which followed the opening of the first seal, the letting loose of invading hordes from the East. In a Jewish Apocalypse of the same period we find a similar anticipation: "A voice was heard; let these four kings be loosed which are bound beside the river Euphrates, which shall destroy a third part of mankind. And they were loosed, and there was a great commotion." And again in the Book of Enoch we have: "In those days shall the angels gather themselves together, and turn eastwards to the Parthians and the Medes, and stir up their kings so that a spirit of unrest comes over them, and chase, them from their thrones, so that like lions they break forth from their lairs, and like hungry

\* Joel. ii. 2-11



wolves upon the herds." The basis of this part of the vision is probably the same anticipation of invasion of the Empire by the Parthians, the "terrible riding folk." Men in those days foresaw a "Yellow Peril" with no less anxiety than some do to-day. And more than once in the history of Europe this has been the form which God's judgment has taken, as when the Huns, the Tartars, and the Ottomans were successively let loose from their abodes in the East.

The judgment ushered in by the sixth trumpet is followed, like the sixth seal, by a parenthesis, but in this case by a much longer one, which covers chapters ten and eleven down to the thirteenth verse. Then we read: "The second Woe is past; behold, the third Woe cometh quickly." Then the seventh angel sounds, and his sounding is followed not by silence, like the seventh seal, but by "great voices in heaven," by an outburst of praise from the multitude which no man can number, and a solemn proclamation of the glorious consummation, "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." This is plainly one aspect of the end; but the end in all its fulness and finality is not yet; for a new scene is set, a new background revealed in heaven, the open temple of God, and therein the ark of His covenant. The meaning of this is once more that all which

follows, the carrying out of judgment in further detail, takes place in presence of this open temple, and in presence of this symbol of God's covenant grace toward men. The symbolism is taken from the worship of the Old Testament, and we shall best realise its meaning if we bear in mind that its New Testament counterpart is found in the Cross of Christ. From henceforth all God's judgments take effect in the foreground of the Cross, which, while it accentuates the guilt of the obstinate and unbelieving, continues to proclaim pardon to those who repent.

Once more we pass over a parenthesis, the third and longest of all, occupying chaps. xii., xiii., and xiv., and come, in xv. 1 and 5, to the third series of judgments, the bowls. This is connected with the preceding one by the statement in the fifth verse: "I saw, and the temple of the tabernacle was opened; and there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues." The pouring of the first four bowls in succession is followed by judgments which correspond in character with those heralded by the first four trumpets, plagues like "the boil bursting forth with blains," by which the Egyptians were afflicted, the turning first of the sea, then of the rivers, into blood, the increase of the sun's heat to destroying power. The fifth bowl, like the fifth trumpet, is followed

by a plague of overwhelming darkness ; and this calamity specially affects the throne and kingdom of the Monster Rome and the Empire of which it is the capital. And the sixth bowl is again like the sixth trumpet, in that it opens once more the way for invasion from the East, through the drying up of the Euphrates, "that the way might be made ready for the kings from the sun-rising." This anticipation is here developed in fuller detail, inasmuch as the evil spirits which inspire the forces of evil, the dragon, the monster, and the false prophet, go forth to summon these and all the other kings of the world to the final conflict. Armageddon, or the "Hill of Megiddo," which is specified as the place to which they are summoned, stands at one end of the great plain of Esdraelon,\* which from the time of Sisera downwards has been one of the historic battle-fields of the world. Finally, the pouring of the seventh bowl is followed, like the seventh seal and the seventh trumpet, by "lightnings and voices and thunders," and "a mighty earthquake," and by "a great voice out of the temple, saying, It is done."

This rapid analysis of the contents of the three-fold cycle of judgments connected with the Seals, the Trumpets and the Bowls, shows how closely

\* Judg. v. 19: and cf. G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of Palestine*, pp. 391 ff.

they are related, and how important it is to examine them apart from the parentheses, each one of which is detachable and in a sense detached from the context. In such an examination three points call for special attention: the general character of the judgment-calamities within each series, the connection of the series one with another, and the general purpose and meaning of this drama of Judgment as a whole.

On the first point, and in reference to the general character of these judgments, it is to be noted that they are the same in kind as men had long been in the habit of recognising as forms of Divine chastisement. They are for the most part calamities of a kind which is already familiar either in history, as the plagues of Egypt, the bitterness of famine, the devastation of war, or in earlier predictions, wherein the Old Testament prophets had foretold calamities which were to follow on disobedience. The calamities foretold in the Apocalypse are the same in kind, though terribly increased in scope and severity. What is going to happen is the same in kind as men already know, the same as what has happened. These natural plagues, disasters, and catastrophes, as we call them, are "natural" only in the sense that they affect men through Nature; these human scourges of tyranny, war, and invasion are "human" only in the sense that in them man

is the instrument of a higher will. "Natural" and "human" though these things may seem, they are none the less supernatural, in the deeper sense that they proceed from God, are allowed and brought about by Him, and work together for the realisation of His holy purpose. From this point of view every such event is a "judgment," the avenging of some outraged law, the vindication of some offended principle. And in order to bring about a judgment which shall be final for one portion of the world's inhabitants, for a nation, or ultimately for the whole world itself, it is not necessary for God to change the *kind* of disaster; He has only to widen its scope, to extend its duration, to suspend the checks which have hitherto been put upon its operation, and that which on the smaller scale we call a natural catastrophe, or put down to merely human causes, would be felt by the survivors to be a judgment of God, would be recognised as corresponding to one of the scenes of this great drama.

In other words, the writer of the Apocalypse takes us, as it were, behind the great web of Nature and of history, and lets us see the hand which sets these and all such phenomena in the fabric of human experience; and his prediction of the accumulated repetition of such phenomena issuing in the destruction of the world "that

lieth in wickedness" rests upon the fact that God has pledged Himself to make an end of evil, to create a new heaven and a new earth "wherein dwelleth righteousness." Thus what he describes as the continuous process of the "last judgment" is for us a continuous process of a present judgment. We are in the midst of it, a process of judgment the end whereof is not yet, but is nearer than when he wrote.

On the second point, this explanation of the character of the judgment is confirmed, when we proceed to consider the relation between these several cycles of judgment. A comparison of these amongst themselves yields a number of perplexing features. Each one of them, the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, is, or seems to be, complete in itself. Each one seems to bring us to the very verge of the final end. And yet the second springs, as it were, with a fresh start from the end of the first, and the third with a fresh start from the end of the second. In what way are we to understand this climax, which proves to be not the end, but a new beginning? Some have sought to trace a progression of predicted events in a straight line through all the three cycles, as though they represented three series of events which are to succeed one another in time, and lead on by three successive stages to the End of all things. Others, seeing the difficulty of



relating the series thus to one another when each one of them so plainly reaches the edge of the End, have adopted what is called the theory of Recapitulation. They assume that the three cycles set forth, in different forms, the same series of events, that each cycle of prediction is in effect a repetition of the other two, the object and result of this repetition being to enforce with triple energy the certainty and terror of these judgments. The true explanation probably lies between these two, and in the recognition of the fact that the judgments of God move on to their final issue in a line which is neither straight nor circular, but spiral. It is like upward progress round a circular mountain, in which each completed circuit brings the traveller to a point which corresponds with that from which he started, but stands above it, nearer the peak, the end. From any point in each circuit he may behold the same section of the landscape, or in the case before us, the same form of impending judgment. From the same point he sees also the peak; and with each completed circuit he finds it nearer, the point from which he shall see the whole complete. But the end is not yet, and again he starts upon another sweep of outlook upon judgments to come, to arrive again at the point where the end seems almost at hand.

And such an anticipation of the future is con-

firmed by human experience. Once and again since this book was written, have men seemed to reach a climax in the world's history, a climax of disaster and oppression and despair, when a cycle of human wickedness seems to have run its course, a full harvest of Divine judgment has been reaped, and men have held their breath in expectation of a final end. We see such crises in the Fall of Rome in the fifth century, with its judgment upon the vices of an effete civilisation ; in the cataclysm of the Reformation, with its judgment on a corrupt Papacy ; in the French Revolution and the judgment then executed upon the *ancien régime* ; and it may well be that we are spectators of something similar in Eastern Europe to-day. In all such crises, men who themselves are caught in the maelstrom of catastrophe, have felt that this must be the "last judgment," as indeed it was for them and for the civilisation of which they formed a part. But the final end was not yet. Judgment fell ; one cycle of judgment had run its course. But another cycle commenced. The final judgment is still to come ; but it is nearer.

So interpreted and understood, this drama of Judgment carries the purpose of its being recorded and its meaning for to-day very near the surface. It depicts for us in the most impressive way the indubitable future—the continuous execution,

through the agency of Nature or of Man, of the proclaimed will of God, that evil shall be destroyed. And though in this book the immediate application is to the larger world, to nations, communities, and classes of men, it cannot be easy to evade the lesson which is written here for the individual too. We see here in a picture of the future, as we see on the same large scale in the history of nations, the pouring of the wrath of God upon all iniquity and sin. And the same law, the same judgment is at work on the smaller scale of individual life and experience; the same cycles, stopping short of destruction, and resuming again with a nearer inevitableness of doom.

The awful reality of this experience has been caught and described by Robert Browning, as by no one else. After drawing a picture of natural catastrophe, the colours for which are largely supplied from this passage in the Apocalypse, he makes the man who beholds it say:—

“I felt begin  
The Judgment Day: to retrocede  
Was too late now. ‘In very deed’  
(I uttered to myself), ‘that Day!’  
The intuition burned away  
All darkness from my spirit too;  
There stood I, found and fixed, I knew,  
Choosing the world.”

“I heard a voice  
Beside me spoke thus: ‘Life is done,  
Time ends, Eternity’s begun,  
And thou art judged for evermore.’”

For him it was so ; and yet it was not yet so for the world. He missed even the false consolation of being involved in a universal ruin.

“I looked up. All seemed as before,  
The common round me, and the sky  
Above, stretched drear and emptily.

. . . . .  
‘A dream—a waking dream at most!  
The world gone, yet the world is here?  
Are not all things as they appear?  
Is Judgment past for me alone?’”

He asks, but asks in vain, “Where had place the great white throne? The rising of the quick and dead?” Though these were still in the future, for him the Judgment was over. It is a great reality of which this poem records the discovery, the possibility, namely, that long ere that last day come, whether the day when “time shall be no more,” or the day when time shall be no more for *him*, a man may incur the judgment which for him is final. He may do it, by giving no heed to the warning judgments which he sees falling upon others, or the earlier judgments which have fallen upon himself, by going on still in the wickedness out of which God has done all He can to shake him, to arouse him by the witness of word and experience. Or he may escape it if he sees these things, the dealings of God with men, with nations, with himself, in the

light in which St. John puts them, in the light which streams from an open heaven, where God is, the Creator; where Christ is, the Redeemer, in the light which streams from the Cross, and irradiates the love of God which prevails over sin, and the great truth: "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

## THE VISION OF THE REDEEMED IN HEAVEN

REV. vii.

THE seventh chapter of the Apocalypse contains a vision, that of the "multitude which no man could number," which is among the most familiar and most highly treasured passages in the book. The meaning of this vision stands little in need of explanation; its value is not to be enhanced by exposition. It speaks straight to the heart of every Christian. The picture of the Church triumphant, drawn "out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues," offering the praise of heaven to God and the Lamb; the question, "Who are these?" and its answer; the description of their privileges as the flock shepherded by the Lamb, the people of God's own care—these things speak for themselves. But regarded as a whole and in its relation to the rest of the book, the chapter presents us with a problem, and the solution of the problem throws



valuable light on the larger problem of the book's construction.

We observe in the first place the parenthetic character of the chapter. Very obviously it breaks the continuity of the vision of the Seals. The opening of each seal has been followed by the consequent judgment, briefly and tersely recorded. The judgment following on the sixth seal has been recorded like the rest ; and just when, on the analogy of the rest of the vision, we are looking for the seventh seal, this chapter intervenes, and the seventh seal is not opened until the eighth chapter is reached. The character of the chapter is also strikingly different from that of the context. The vision in which it is set is a vision of judgment. With the single exception of the fifth, the seals have ushered in one form or other of destructive agency upon earth. Here we have a vision of Redemption, of the serenity and bliss of the redeemed in heaven. When this chapter is left behind, the unrolling of judgment proceeds as before through the trumpets and the bowls. The chapter, then, is a parenthesis, linked in thought with the scene disclosed by the fifth seal, and awaking anticipations of future visions of a similar character, which find their culmination in the vision of the New Jerusalem.

When we come to examine the chapter itself, we can hardly fail to be conscious of a well-

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marked division between the eighth verse and the ninth. There is a break, a change, a sudden expansion of horizon. And this is not due to any change of subject. The subject is the same throughout the chapter, the "sealing" of the faithful, with a view to their being preserved during, and to the end of, the impending calamities. The difference between the two parts of the chapter, which we cannot help recognising, lies not in the subject, but in the way it is treated, in the tone, the atmosphere, of the second as distinguished from the first. And as we dwell upon the two parts separately, other points of difference clearly emerge.

In the first half we have the imagery of one angel holding fast the four winds, and the other angel ascending from the east; imagery which is plainly Apocalyptic in its character; in the second, the imagery is almost wholly familiar, being culled for the most part from Old Testament prophecy. Further indications are not wanting that, while the scene of the second half is evidently laid in heaven, that of the first half is to be sought on earth. The four winds are the winds of Nature, and the earth, sea, and trees, which they are not to injure, belong to the earth; in contrast to this, every detail of the second part is consistent only with the life of heaven. And, once more, a comparison of the sections reveals a

marked difference in their respective outlooks on the future. In the first, those who are sealed are a limited, even if it be a symbolic, number. They all belong to the house of Israel. And this double limitation, both of numbers and of race, is further emphasised in a very striking way by the rehearsal of the number of the sealed who are drawn from each individual tribe. Looked at by itself, and even apart from any comparison with what follows, it is not difficult to see that this passage breathes the essential spirit of Judaism, its particularism, the consciousness of being the chosen people, the national pride not altogether free from contempt for the Gentiles, which found expression in the saying, "Salvation is of the Jews." The prospect of being preserved through the approaching tribulation is in these eight verses confined to the children of Abraham. And this impression of the Jewish character of this passage is indefinitely strengthened by the contrast in this respect which is offered by the second section of the chapter, where all the emphasis is laid on the facts that the number of the sealed is such that "no man can number," and that they are drawn not from any one race, but "out of all kindreds and nations."

Before considering this contrast in detail, however, there is still another point to be observed in connection with the first half, and

that is the curious omission of one of the twelve tribes from the list there given. All the other tribes are mentioned, but not the tribe of Dan. When we inquire what may be the reason for this strange omission, the most probable explanation is found in connection with a tradition, which made its appearance in post-exilic Judaism, to the effect that as the Messiah was to arise out of the tribe of Judah, so the anti-Messiah ("Antichrist") would spring from the tribe of Dan. So strong did this opinion become that this tribe was, as we should say, excommunicated by certain Rabbinic theologians; it was denied any share in the anticipated glories of the future.

Adding this to the points previously noted, the earthly plane on which the vision moves, and the spirit of national particularism by which it is shaped, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that we have before us a document not of Christian but of Jewish origin, whose presence is to be explained by the simple suggestion that the Apostle quotes this passage from some Jewish Apocalypse with which he was familiar.

Some such explanation of its origin becomes almost imperative when we pass on to the second half of the chapter, and find how strongly it contrasts at every point with the first.

The contrast appears, if we may not say

intentional, at least conscious, on the part of the writer. There, the sealed are reckoned as a definite number; their number (and that means their limitation) is specially insisted on. Here, the sealed are a vast multitude, whose special characteristic is that no man can number them. There they are drawn wholly from one nation, and specifically from the tribes of which it was composed. Here it is specially insisted that they are out of all nations; the Apostle seems to rejoice in heaping up words to show that every barrier of race has disappeared. A still deeper contrast underlies the condition on the fulfilment of which the blessedness of the redeemed is declared to rest. In the first half they who are sealed are men of Israel who are "servants of God." The condition of salvation is still that of the old dispensation, viz., that a man should be of the chosen race, and abide in loyal union with the people whom God had chosen to serve Him. Here, in the second half, that condition is no longer insisted on, and another has taken its place. They who serve God day and night in His temple, are there not because they have belonged to any human stock or earthly society, but because "they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

It would, indeed, be difficult to exaggerate the

difference between the two parts of the same chapter. And yet they are not contradictory; the one is contained in the other as the Old Testament is contained in the New, and the whole might be described as a supreme illustration of the difference Christ has made.

For let us try to realise how this chapter came to be. God, who has in these last times spoken to us by His Son, had spoken before at sundry times and in divers manners through His servants the prophets. John, the writer of the book, takes his stand with the prophets. He writes in the spirit of prophecy, though in the form of an Apocalypse. As a Jew, one of the sons of Zebedee, he would be brought up in a circle where not only the books of our Old Testament would be current, but many other books in which especially the hopes of the Messianic future were expounded and enforced. It is at least possible that the first eight verses of this chapter formed part of one of these books; their contents would certainly be part of the furnishing of John's mind as a pious Jew of the time of Christ. To him, though now a disciple of Christ—to him, even writing under the inspiration of Christ's Spirit—they seemed important, valuable, it may be essential, to a complete presentation of the future. So he incorporates them in his own Apocalypse. But *then*. Surely we have here a spectacle of the



most amazing kind, nothing less than a man laid hold of before our very eyes by the Spirit of Christ, and caught up into the seventh heaven of spiritual reality. As when we ourselves have climbed to the top of some high mountain, and stand there conscious only of being lifted far above the plain, until the dark comes on, and the eminence on which we stand, with all the others round about, dwarfs into nothingness in presence of the ethereal immensities of night; so John's little bit of Apocalypse, dear and uplifting as it had been to him, sinks into flatness, as the heavens open, and he sees God's redeeming purpose in all its limitless profundity. His Jewish expectation of the future becomes merely a platform from which he is swept off to contemplate and describe the purpose of God larger than the Jews had ever known, a purpose that included all nations and kindreds and tongues.

The details of the vision which follows require, as we have said, neither explanation nor exposition; but there is still something to be learnt from the method of this revelation, and regarding the central idea round which it turns.

As to the method of Revelation, we have here a literary parallel to the flower in the hand of the poet:—

“ Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies,

Hold you here, root and all, in my hand ;  
Little flower, if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is."

We pluck this flower of Christian thought, and along with flower and stem there comes away, as from loose soil, the root also, and the seedlet, out of which all the beauty and the glory have sprung ; and if we could understand what it is, "root and all, and all in all," we should learn something of God's way of revealing Himself to man. The two parts of this chapter represent two stages in the conception of the future given to men by God. The Apostle has received one "by tradition from his fathers" ; he passes to the other by inspiration from God. The Word, in order to become vocal to men, must take flesh, must enshrine itself in human form or forms. That is to say, God comes down to man, takes him as he is, at some particular stage of moral or spiritual development, to make him the instrument of His revelation ; plants him on some thought, some truth, some institution, in the highest form it has yet attained, and from that draws him up to a level from which his previous attainment seems insignificant—and may even seem false—clarifies the thought, purifies and consecrates the institution, and so out of seed and soil, through rain and sunshine, draws the matchless beauty of perfect truth, and

the priceless fruit of perfect holiness. If so be that John's glorious vision had its root in a Jewish picture of the future, the growth was none the less, nay, all the more, of God.

It might be asked, however, how do we know that it was a growth not only towards beauty, but also towards truth? The answer is, we know, because it satisfies the one test of truth which God has put into our hands; it is in harmony with the mind of Christ. The imagery in which the central idea of the vision is clothed is largely drawn from the Old Testament; but the idea itself, that God's redeeming love is not limited to race or clime, but "broad as are the heavens above"—the idea itself is of Christ. He dealt with man as man, not with man as Jew or Gentile; the cases which might appear contradictory to this were but those in which He paused to pierce below the surface of racial distinction to the common qualities of the human heart beneath. The Gentiles also were His heritage, His purchase, and His care. "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also must I bring, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." So He charged His followers to go and make disciples "of all nations." And when one of these declares that "in Christ Jesus there is . . . neither Jew nor Gentile," and another of them foresees in the glorious consummation

of Christ the gathering of a multitude which no man could number out of all nations upon earth, no one can deny that these are speaking in accordance with the mind of Christ. There is a Spirit of Christ, which leads His humble disciples into all truth, and "all truth" is an expansion of the truth as it is in Jesus.

If light is thus thrown on the method by which the Spirit of Christ expresses Himself through the mind of a man, attention is also focussed on the central idea of the vision, which is the unity of the race before the throne of God, the opening of God's Kingdom to men of all nations under heaven, the removal of the most impregnable barriers which had hitherto divided men. The Seer sets before us a picture of the future, which is still so far from being realised, that our faith flutters towards it, and falls with broken wing. And yet his picture and prediction had facts for their background, facts which together form one of the miracles of history.

Our Lord is said to have done many signs and wonders; but of all those which bore on human life there is none so marvellous as this, that He did break down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. No racial or social separation we could think of would be less likely to give way than this. But it did give way, before the preaching of the Gospel. Both were made one

by the blood of the Cross. This bringing together of Jew and Gentile to dwell together as members of one Church, as it took place all round the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean in the first century, was one of those "greater works" which Christ predicted would be brought about by His disciples; and it is a fact of history against which the waves of criticism hurl themselves in vain.

We, too, have our divisions, domestic and social; we have our middle walls of partition, ecclesiastical and racial. We despair of healing them; we hardly hope to see them removed. Is not this the reason, that we do not bring to bear the one remedy which has proved effective, the love of God shed abroad in men's hearts through Jesus Christ? We have never thought of it, or we never thought it practical. It was very practical indeed in the first century, when its success proved the historical basis of this vision. The love of God to all men revealed and mediated through Jesus Christ was the mighty solvent of all barriers then, barriers of race, barriers of pride, barriers of selfishness. Beset and divided as we are by the like barriers, we stand between the fact of success then, and this picture of perfected success for the Divine remedy yonder. We may be taking our stand like the Apostle on some traditional conception of our distinctness and

distinction as a family, as a class, as a Church, as a nation ; but if vision of heavenly realities is vouchsafed to us by the Spirit of Christ, we shall see that the far-off Divine event for which our life and worship are preparing now, is one from which all such barriers and distinctions have disappeared, and that the Divine power unto salvation, in which we trust, is one before which even now such barriers may go down.



## THE SECOND PARENTHESIS

REV. x.-xi. 13

THE closing verses of the ninth chapter record the blowing of the sixth trumpet, and the events which follow; the sounding of the seventh trumpet is not recorded until we reach the fifteenth verse of the eleventh chapter: what lies between is best understood if we regard it as a parenthesis similar to the one we found in the seventh chapter between the sixth and seventh seals. Any one who marks the close connection between the passage ending with ix. 21 and the passage beginning with xi. 14 will recognise that there is a breach at least in the mechanical continuity of the whole; and when attention is further directed to the contents of what lies between, it discloses material of a new character, not directly connected with the Vision of Judgment. The record of that vision reads smoothly and continuously if this passage be omitted. Only a careful consideration of the parenthesis will make clear its relations to what stands before and after.

Those who have assailed the unity of the Apocalypse naturally discover in a passage like this support for their theory that we have in this book the work of several different authors or editors, or a Jewish Apocalypse worked up into a book for Christian edification. But of the many theories of partition which have been put forward, no one has succeeded in commending itself to the general assent of scholars; and the tendency among the best critics at the present time is towards recognising in the Apocalypse a single original document, the work of one Christian hand—the undoubted difficulties being met by the theory that this Christian writer on certain occasions incorporated in his own work quotations from earlier literature which may have been Jewish in its origin. This suggestion need not, however, arise in connection with the tenth chapter, the most probable account of which is that given by Bousset.

“Chapter x. is in fact a transitional chapter from the hand of the Apocalyptist himself, which is to be regarded not as a subsequent addition, but as a digression, in which he is at pains to adjust himself to the future course of his revelation, seeing that the fulness of the story threatens gradually to introduce a certain confusion. It is not, however, to be regarded as an introduction to xi. 1-13 alone; rather does the last verse (“Thou

must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings") point far beyond xi. 13, right up to chapters xvii. and xviii. Thus does chapter x. stand in the middle of the whole great composition, and form a powerful clamp, by means of which the component parts are held together, which otherwise tend to fall asunder. It looks backwards in the description of the angel-vision to chapter i., in the mention of the angel of the seventh trumpet to the six first trumpets; and it looks forward to the "mystery of God," which is to unveil itself in chapter xii., the revelation, first sweet and then bitter, of the fall of the dragon from heaven, and his last great conflict upon earth." \*

It is an awe-inspiring figure which the Apostle sees, "a strong angel," with face like the sun, and feet like pillars of fire, bestriding both earth and sea as though he claimed both for spheres of his authority. The utterance of his voice unlooses the "seven thunders," by which is meant apparently another series of judgments similar to those connected with the seals on the trumpets. But a voice from heaven forbids the Seer to write the things which are uttered by the thunders. The angel then proclaims with solemn oath that "time shall be no longer, but in the days when" the seventh angel is about to sound,

\* Bousset, *Offenbarung Johannes*, p. 370.

the mystery of God will be fulfilled; in other words, the final end waits only for the sounding of that trumpet. At the bidding of the same voice as spoke to him before, the Seer approaches the angel, and asks that he should give him "the little book" which is open in his hand. He is told not only to take it, but to eat it; "it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey." This episode is to be carefully compared with the similar one in the prophecies of Ezekiel, where the prophet is prepared for speaking the word of God to the rebellious house of Israel by being caused to eat "a roll of a book": "Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel."\* Ezekiel's roll was sweet in the mouth, "as honey for sweetness"; but there is no reference to its being also bitter, even though "there was written therein lamentations and mourning and woe." Both the resemblance and the contrast are instructive. Ezekiel's experience corresponds with the satisfaction of a man who is filled with the word of God, whatever may be the character of the message he has to deliver. John is impressed rather with the mingled character of the revelation which is symbolically conveyed to him in the "little book." This arises from the fact that these

\* Ezek. ii. 8-iii. 3.

prophecies contain at once evil and good, judgment and glory, for the wicked and the righteous respectively; but also it expresses the mingled readiness and disinclination of every true prophet to be the mouthpiece of the Divine wrath.

What were the contents of the little book it is not possible to say, beyond this, that the Apostle understood it to contain some portion, great or small, possibly the whole, of the Revelations which follow. He is conscious that although the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which is immediately to follow, will mark the end of the process of judgment, there are yet other things given him both to see and to record, and these things form the contents of the "little book." They are found in the last ten chapters, where the writer's attention is specially occupied with the Church, its struggle and discipline, its foes and friends, its victory and peace. These, then, are the contents of the little book, as the judgment-purposes of God toward the whole world were the contents of the sealed book of chapter v. This chapter, therefore, is of great importance for the understanding of the construction of the Apocalypse. It expresses in symbolic form the consciousness of the writer that after the close of the Vision of Judgment his work was not to come to an end as might have been expected, but to take, as it were, a new start: "Thou must

prophecy again." And so it acts as a great bracket by which the two parts of his book are held together.

### THE MEASURING OF THE TEMPLE, AND THE TWO WITNESSES.

Rev. xi. 1-13.

The eleventh chapter, down to the fourteenth verse, where the Vision of Judgment is resumed, contains an episode which until quite recently has caused great perplexity to the commentators, the prophecy concerning the Two Witnesses, together with the verses about the measuring of the temple by which this prophecy is introduced. "There was given unto me a reed like unto a rod : and one said, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." In the symbolism of Scripture, this act of measuring may signify one of three different things. It may be done with a view to building or rebuilding, or with a view to destruction, or as a symbol of preservation in peril or from destruction. The following verse leaves no doubt that it is the last of these significations which is here intended. The outer court of the Temple is not to be measured, and the reason is that it has "been given to the nations," and to be trodden under foot with the



rest of the Holy City for forty and two months. It follows that what is to be measured is marked out for preservation when all else falls into the hands of the enemy; the Holy Place with the altar and them that worship therein are to be spared. It is a prophecy concerning Jerusalem that when the Holy City falls into the hands of the Gentiles, they shall be withheld from invading the inner court of the Temple or injuring those that worship there.

Viewing these verses apart from the context in which they stand, it is not difficult to discern the circumstances to which the prophecy they contain would directly apply, or to fix the date to which they most probably belong. Jerusalem is still the Holy City, the city with the Temple in its midst. In other words, the fatal year A.D. 70 has not yet passed over it. It is threatened, it may be actually besieged, by the "nations"; that is to say, the Roman attack is impending, or actually in progress,\* when this prophecy is uttered to encourage the faithful inhabitants with the assurance that, though the greater part of the city, and even the outer court of the Temple, must fall into the hands of the enemy,

\* Johannes Weiss (*die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 130) is of opinion that the eleventh chapter can be dated with exactness, between May and August of the year 70. A later date is impossible.

the inner court and the sanctuary will remain inviolate. We have before us, in fact, a close parallel to the prediction of Jesus, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," coupled with the assurance that the Holy Place and God's true worshippers therein shall escape destruction.

These verses stand here as an introduction to the prophecy touching the two witnesses. It is not easy to say whether they were found by John already connected with this ancient prophecy, or whether it was he who brought the two together. If we could trace with any certainty the spiritual or secondary interpretation, which, being put by him upon these verses, might have led him to quote them from an independent source, we should be more ready to assign the collocation to himself. But there is no evidence that the Christians of the first century saw in the Temple at Jerusalem a symbol of the universal Church, or that they would understand this prophecy, standing by itself, as having any bearing on the circumstances of their own time. It seems more probable, therefore, that the Apostle found these verses already forming an introduction to the prophecy of the two witnesses, and quoted it as a whole.

We say "quoted," for this is one of the passages in the Revelation (three in all) in

which, if we are to preserve the unity of authorship, or indeed to approximate to an understanding of the Book, we must recognise that the Apostle is using older material. Here it is material which has come down to him by tradition, as elsewhere it is material furnished by the Old Testament. We are prepared for this, in the first place, by the fact that the whole passage is a parenthesis, breaking the continuity of the Vision of Judgment; then by the fact that it introduces an altogether new circle of ideas, the interest of which centres on the earthly Jerusalem, its temple, and those that worship therein, its fate, and the duration of its misery; and yet again by the strange abruptness with which the third verse opens: "And I (God or Christ) will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy." The contents of the passage which follows to a large extent confirms the suggestion to which these observations give rise. It is full of ideas and phrases which are at home in Jewish thought. And in particular the subject of the two witnesses, with which it is concerned, was one which played a large part in Jewish anticipation of the future. The anticipation takes its rise in the prophecy of Malachi (iii. 23, f.), is the subject of frequent allusion in the Apocalyptic literature, and makes its appearance in several passages of the Gospel. As to who the

two witnesses, the forerunners of Messiah, were to be, there was considerable variation of opinion. One of them was generally understood to be Elijah, the other sometimes Moses, sometimes Enoch, sometimes Jeremiah. Their function, according to Jewish anticipation, was to bear public witness to the falling away of God's people under the influence of Antichrist, and to urge them to repentance. The tradition becomes clear as to its details and connections from the second century onwards, and is thus set forth by Bousset. From this time onwards, "an Apocalyptic tradition concerning the appearance of Antichrist can be shown to exist, which cannot have had its first rise at the point where we recognise it, but had a much higher antiquity. According to this tradition, it was expected that in Jerusalem itself a God-resisting power would make its appearance, which is conceived now as tyrant, now rather as a false Messiah, and that it would force the whole people into apostasy. It shall collect in Jerusalem a great host drawn from many various nations, and exercise its terrible domination for three years and a half. Then will stand forth against this Power the two witnesses (an idea, the origin of which is still obscure). According to tradition, they are Elijah and Enoch. They will unmask the Antichrist, and, following on their preaching, a large

number of the Jews will again turn away from Antichrist, and be converted to the old faith. On that account Antichrist will slay the witnesses, and then the believers will flee into the wilderness." \* This well-established and long-persisting tradition enables us to fix the primary meaning of the salient points in the prophecy before us. It refers to the earthly Jerusalem. Within its walls the two witnesses are to do their work. The duration of their prophesying is to correspond with the duration of the domination of Antichrist. The miraculous powers which are assigned to them are the same as those recorded as having been used by Elijah and by Moses. The "peoples and tribes and nations" who look upon their dead bodies are those assembled in Jerusalem in obedience to the summons of the Antichrist.

In all this we see ideas and parts of a tradition which have their original home in Judaism. If we find a Christian Apostle incorporating them here in his own Apocalypse, the interesting questions for us are, Why he does it? and, How he does it? That he must have attached a new, a Christian, interpretation to this earlier prophecy is plain, first, from the fact that he makes use of it, and, secondly, from the traits and touches which are plainly added by his own hand.

\* Bousset, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 383.

Among them the most conspicuous and most touching is the phrase, "Where also their Lord was crucified." How eloquent that is, first, of the Apostle's own connection with that tragedy, then of his deep appreciation of its meaning. That single touch changes the whole character of the passage, as that event changed the significance of Jerusalem. Apart from that, it was a city which "spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt." With that, viewed in the light of that great fact, it had become once more the symbol of God's peaceful dwelling with men. And He was "their Lord," that is to say, the witnesses of whom St. John is thinking are now men who have hailed Christ as Lord and God. And this prepares us for the most striking alteration which the old material undergoes at his hand, the description of the resurrection of the "witnesses." "After the three days and a half, the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet." To this feature in this prophecy there is no parallel in the Jewish tradition. We see, therefore, how the Apostle handled the material which he was led to employ; can we trace any reason for its use?

We have to find, if possible, the link between the ideas with which the Apostle's mind was filled in consequence of his visions in Patmos, and this group of ideas with which he was



supplied by memory. Two such links suggest themselves. One is the reference, in verse 7, to "the beast that cometh up out of the abyss," which is to make war with the witnesses, "and overwhelm them and kill them." If this description of the anti-Messias formed part of the traditional material (and the way in which the description is introduced points in that direction), it may have been, in part at least, because of this that the Apostle quoted this passage, giving to it an application to the circumstances of the Church, and adding to it the promise of resurrection. There was what the Jews expected, Jerusalem in ruins, the witnesses for God slain by Antichrist, the nations of the world assembled to gape and mock at their dead bodies. And if there was that in his own vision of the future which corresponded with this at many points, the world in ruins, the monster out of the abyss tyrannising over the people of God, those who kept the testimony of Jesus, paying for their faithfulness with their lives, there was also this, which changed it all, that these witnesses for Christ lived again, and "heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither."

Another, and possibly a stronger, link might be found in the word "witnesses" itself, and the ideas connected with it. In its Greek form and other cognate words, it occupies an important

place in the Apocalypse. The Apostle was conscious that in the very act of delivering the contents of the book, he was "bearing witness" of the word of God (i. 2); it was because of his "witnessing" to Jesus that he found himself banished to Patmos. It was because of "the witnessing of Jesus" that those had been slain, whose souls are gathered beneath the altar (vi. 9). The one man, apart from the author, whose name is mentioned in the book is Antipas, "my faithful witness" (ii. 13). The word which John uses has passed over into our language in its Greek form of "martyr," and has undergone a narrowing of its meaning to one who suffers death for Christ's sake. But for the Apostle the witnessing both before and in the death, or suffering, was equally important with the death itself. The idea has equal prominence in the Fourth Gospel, and is, indeed, one of the links by which the "Johannine" writings are united together.\* If the Messiah, whose coming was still awaited by the Jews, was to have "witnesses" to prepare His way, the Christ, whose immediate return was the centre of John's Revelation, must have them also, not two, but many of them, as many as

\* The word rendered above by "witness-bearing" (in the English versions usually "testimony") occurs nine times in the Apocalypse, fourteen times in the Fourth Gospel, six times in the Epistles of John, elsewhere in the New Testament seven times only.

truly looked for His appearing. The point of contact between the Apostle's mind, quickened by his vision, and this earlier prophecy, would be not the number of the witnesses, nor yet the great men of old with whom they were traditionally identified, but their function, to bear witness over against a rebellious people, and their fate, to suffer the last penalty at the hands of Antichrist. Not different was the function, not dissimilar might be the fate of those who were "witnesses" for the returning Christ. Only in these points was their position different, that for them their Lord had been crucified, and for them the summons would come from heaven, "Come up hither." It was this which gave the old prophecy value in the Apostle's sight, and it was by the addition of these two great Christian ideas of the death of Christ and the resurrection of His faithful witnesses, that he gives it a Christian interpretation and a place in his Apocalypse.

## THE THIRD PARENTHESIS: THE VISION OF THE WOMAN, THE MAN-CHILD, AND THE DRAGON

REV. xii.

THE picture of the future which the Apostle has seen and is charged to describe contains three main elements—the judgment of God upon a wicked and unbelieving world, the sufferings of the Church as the victim of world-powers which have authority to exercise their tyranny for a season, and the final victory of Christ followed by the glories and peace of heaven. These elements interpenetrate one another throughout the book, but in different sections one element or other predominates. Thus, in the section which we have just left (chaps. vi.–xi.), the main contents is concerned with the process of judgment by which God vindicates His righteousness before the return of Christ. In the closing section (chaps. xix.–xxii.) the governing idea is that of the victory of Christ and the bliss of the redeemed. In that with which we have now to

do (chaps. xii.-xviii.) it is the enemies of the Church, their tyranny, and the sufferings she is to endure at their hands round which the visions are grouped. The fourteenth chapter provides a contrast and relief, but the author's task in these chapters is to unveil the enemies of the Church and to explain their power.

The second parenthesis has been followed by the completion of the series of judgments ushered in by the trumpets; a definite pause has been reached in the unrolling of the Vision of Judgment, which is resumed and completed in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters. The tenth chapter, with its vision of the "little book" and its suggestion of a new experience of insight into the future, accompanied by the declaration, "thou shalt prophesy again," prepares us for a new subject and what looks like a fresh start. The subject is the enemies of the Church, treated most fully in the thirteenth chapter; and to that we have in the chapter before us an introduction, which also is a parenthesis.\* With the two

\* One purpose of this description given to the three passages is to facilitate a comprehensive view of the book as a whole. Possibly the whole three chapters (xii.-xiv.) should be reckoned as a parenthesis here; the Vision of Judgment would then stand as a compact whole. This is the view taken in the *Century Bible*, but it might seem to ignore the salient importance of chap. xiii.; and it is better, perhaps, to confine the description to chapter xii., always

chapters which follow, it also breaks the continuity of the Vision of Judgment. And we shall find that it partakes in a marked degree of the characteristics by which the first and second parentheses are marked.

The difficulty of this chapter is obvious to every reader. It is probably felt to be the most difficult chapter in the book. The narrative itself is straightforward enough, but it introduces us to a course of events so extraordinary that we can neither picture them as actually happening, nor interpret them as symbols. And yet we are conscious of an elusive substance below the surface of the picture which, could we but grasp it, would prove to be familiar as household words, and yet precious as a new discovery. "Through its fissures we get hints" of the birth of Christ, of the attempted destruction of the child by Herod, of His ascension to God, of the discomfiture of the powers of evil, and the certain victory of the saints. And yet, were this the presentation in vision-form of the events of Christ's life, are these the events, we ask ourselves, which the Apostle John would relate to the exclusion of others—the death, the resurrec-

remembering that the Vision of the Bowls is still to come. It is important to observe that on this arrangement each of the three "parentheses" not only contains, but largely or almost wholly consists of, material quoted by the writer.



tion? And how are we to account for and interpret the strange imagery in which the allusions to these events, if such they be, are embedded and even expressed?

To take only one example, verses 15 and 16 give us a picture to which there is no parallel and no key in all the symbolism of Scripture, for which commentators and expositors have sought in vain to find a satisfactory interpretation in the history of the Church. "The serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman water as a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth." Of all the explanations of this strange picture which have been offered, that of Dean Alford is perhaps the most plausible. He lays stress on the numerous parallels found in this chapter to the experiences of Israel escaping from Egypt. "There we have the flight into the wilderness; there, again, the forty-two stations corresponding to the forty-two months of the three years and a half of this prophecy; there, too, the miraculous passage of the Red Sea, not indeed in strict correspondence with this last feature, but at least suggestive of it." But it may be asked how would these allusions to the Exodus be in place after what is understood to

describe the birth of the Messiah, or of Jesus? Or what is there in the experience of Israel before the Exodus which might be symbolised by the birth of the child? Proceeding to an historical interpretation, Alford suggests that the river may stand for the Roman armies which threatened to sweep away Christianity in the wreck of the Jewish nation; or of the persecution which followed the Church into her retreats, but eventually became absorbed by the civil power turning Christian; or of the influx of heretical opinions from the pagan philosophies, which threatened to swamp the true faith. We may indeed see in one, or in all, of these events historical analogy to what is symbolically predicted here; but only the first can be said to lie within the horizon of the future, as the Apostle saw it, and that is hardly adequate to the rest of the prophecy. Besides, is it conceivable that, with any of these generalities before his mind, the Seer would have thrown them into the form of such symbols as these? Indeed, does not the interpretation leave much, and that just the most perplexing part, of the imagery unexplained? The earth "helping the woman" by swallowing up the river finds no parallel in any event in the history of the Church. We cannot, therefore, but concur in the conclusion to which Alford comes: "I confess that not one of these [interpretations] seems

to me satisfactorily to answer the conditions ; nor do we gain anything by their combination."

The possibilities of explanation of this chapter as it stands, appearing thus to be exhausted, we may be prepared to test the suggestion that here again, for the third time, we have the Apostle quoting an earlier prophecy, to which he gives a Christian interpretation. We observe, in the first place, the remarkable and unusual way in which the chapter opens. The writer does not say that he saw this vision ; in this instance alone of all the visions recorded in his book, the account begins thus, "And there was seen." And here only that which was seen is described as "a sign." These points seem at once to differentiate this vision from those seen by John himself. The sign was seen "in the sky," that is to say, on the plane of a vision, so that no difficulty need be felt when subsequently we find the child being caught up to heaven as though from earth, or the woman fleeing "into the wilderness." The woman gives birth to a child, "who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron." That puts beyond question who is meant by the child. The quotation from the Messianic Psalm shows that he is the Messiah. Still, this might be either the Messiah looked for by the Jews, or Jesus, the Messiah whom the Christians believed to have come. But he is caught up, apparently at once, to the throne of

God ; and here the vision breaks away from the history of Jesus ; we hear no more of the child. But if the child stands originally not for Jesus, but for the Messiah, then the woman stands for Israel, probably the ideal Israel, whose glory is described with unimagined splendour in the first verse, “ a woman arrayed with the Sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” The main interest of the prophecy rests upon the woman, her fortunes, and her fate. The dragon, the Antichrist, had been at first the enemy of her child, the Messiah ; but the end of the prophecy describes how he became incensed against the woman herself, and “ persecuted the woman which brought forth the man-child.” The reason is that in the meantime there has been “ war in heaven.” “ Michael and his angels ” have fought with the dragon, and have prevailed, and the great dragon has been cast down to the earth with his angels. But why “ Michael ” ? His name stands for a figure which is prominent enough in the Apocalyptic literature of the Jews, but is mentioned only twice in the New Testament. The allusion in Jude (verse 9) is almost certainly based upon something related in the *Assumption of Moses* ; does it not seem as though there must be a similar source for the allusion here ? It was entirely in accordance with the conceptions of Judaism that Michael should

appear as the champion of Israel,\* as the captain of the hosts of the Lord. But Christian thought assigns that place and function to Christ Jesus, and to Him alone. It is He who, later on in this same book, appears at the head of "the armies which are in heaven"; it is against Him that "the kings of the earth and their armies are gathered together to make war" (xix. 20). If we find that in this passage another takes His place, the presumption is very strong that the Apostle is making use of older, and of Jewish material.†

The dragon being overcome by the angelic champion of Israel and "cast out of heaven," proceeds to wreak his vengeance on those to whom he owes his discomfiture. But help comes to the woman. She flees "into the wilderness," and there is nourished for the period over which the reign of Antichrist extends. Another attempt on the part of her enemy to compass her destruction is frustrated by "the earth opening her mouth and swallowing up the river"; after which the dragon, waxing yet more wroth, goes away "to make war with the rest of her seed."

\* Cf. Dan. xii. 1, with x. 13.

† See R. H. Charles, art. "Michael," in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*. "Here the figure of Michael thrusts aside that of the Messiah: for it is Michael and not the Child that overthrows Satan when storming the heavens—a fact which speaks strongly for the Jewish origin of most of Rev. xii."

Up to this point we found nothing in this chapter so easily detachable from its context, which conflicts with the theory that in its original form it was a Jewish prophecy; and we have found not a little to support it. In that form it would be a prophecy of the "Messianic woes," which were to fall upon Israel before the coming of the Messiah, "the sufferings that lead up to the Christ."\* The peculiar feature of this prophecy would be that these woes are described as following on the birth of the child who was to be the Messiah. And that is the very point on which we may suppose that the Apostle's mind would fasten. For him and for his fellow-believers in Jesus that child had been already born, according to prophecy. Moreover, He ascended to the throne of God, and His followers were waiting anxiously for His return. The sufferings which, according to this prophecy, were to be the portion of ideal Israel, were of the same kind, and due to the same evil forces as those which, according to John's own vision, were to be the portion of Christ's true Church. This prophecy, therefore, had a meaning for Christ's disciples, which was plain to the man who had seen the vision of His return; it gave a clue to the understanding of that tribulation through which the Church was about to pass. The case is parallel to the wit-

\* 1 Pet. i. 11; see *Expositor*, 1905, pp. 234 ff.



nesses in the eleventh chapter. If Israel was to have witnesses going before the Messiah, and to suffer many things at the hand of Antichrist before Messiah came, much more must the Church have her witnesses, and "make up that which was lacking" in the sufferings which were to be endured before Jesus the Christ returned.

We see now how this prophecy, which had first been current in Jewish circles, may have presented itself to the mind of St. John as capable of application to the Christians for whom he wrote. Before mentioning another point of attachment, let us observe the indications of the way in which he interpreted it, and how he adapted it for his own purpose. There are two passages which are undoubtedly added by his hand, verses 10 and 11, and the end of verse 17. In these passages we hear again the great language of the Apocalypse. In the first we have the proclamation of victory over Satan with its ringing note of triumph, and its emphasis on the rank and authority of Christ: "Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ." We note that Michael has no place in this song of victory; on the contrary, it is suggested that Satan has been overcome by "our brethren," who "loved not their life even unto death"; and they overcame him "because of the blood of the Lamb." They are the martyrs for

the testimony of Jesus, whom even in heaven the Accuser has accused,\* but in vain. "These are they which have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"; and in the power of that sacrifice they prevail even against their fell accuser.

In the second of these passages (verse 17b) we have the clue to the Apostle's interpretation of the figure of the woman. At the beginning of the prophecy this figure stood for him as for those who first heard it, as representing Israel; for a Jew it would be Israel from which the Messiah was to spring; for the Christian Apostle it would be Israel out of which Jesus had been born. But the ideal Israel, "arrayed with the sun," who gives birth to the Christ, is interpreted at the close of the prophecy, as the mother of His "brethren"; "her seed," which for a Jew would mean faithful members of the Covenant-people, is now explained as equivalent to those "which keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus." The presence of these words shows that John now understood by the woman the Church of Christ. Her "seed" were the disciples of Christ against whom "the old serpent, Satan," was bringing all his power to bear.

This brings us to another and probably a very important point of contact between the mind of

\* Cf. Zech. iii. 1-4.

the Apostle filled with the contents of his own vision, and this remembered piece of prophecy. We have noticed the general analogy to events in the life of Jesus and the close correspondence between the persecution of faithful Israel presented in the prophecy and the tribulation to fall upon the Church, anticipated by St. John ; another point of contact may be found in the power by which both the persecution of Israel and the persecution of the Church are set in motion. In chap. xii. we are told how the dragon, being cast out of heaven, began to persecute the woman and her seed ; in chap. xiii., when John describes his own vision, the agent of persecution is "the beast," and it is "the dragon" that "gave him his power, and his throne, and his authority." Again we find an analogy between the second parenthesis and the third. As the former introduces "the beast that cometh up out of the abyss," so the latter introduces the dragon which gave him his power. Among other reasons which led the Apostle to incorporate this earlier prophecy, we may see this, that it shows that the power behind the beast is the same which pursued Jesus with its hatred, had laid wait for Him, tempted Him, finally compassed His death ; but the same also which He had spurned, thwarted, overcome, and trodden under foot in His resurrection. Moreover,

this prophecy describes how Satan has been overthrown, and cast out of heaven. His very activity on earth is due to his defeat in heaven. And St. John is fully purposed that through all that follows of the revelation of persecution and suffering to come, his readers shall have this great fact vividly present to their minds. Their enemy, their accuser, the power behind their persecutors is potent upon earth; but he has been overthrown in heaven; he knoweth "that he hath but a short time." Let them know it too.

## THE MONSTROUS POWER OF EVIL

REV. xiii.

THE reading adopted by the Revised Version which yields the translation, "*he* stood by the sand of the sea," and makes this clause part of the last verse of the previous chapter, is the one which is attested by the best authorities; and although many of the editors still prefer the old reading, "*I* stood," the new one helps to mark emphatically the connection between the two chapters. The monstrous Powers of Evil whose appearance and activities are to be described in the thirteenth chapter, owe their "power and authority" to the dragon, "the old serpent," or Satan. It was the dragon that men worshipped, when they "bowed to the authority of the beast"; and the foregoing chapter has served a double purpose in introducing the present vision. In the first place, it has explained how the dragon comes to be active in the affairs of earth, and specially bent on persecuting the disciples of Jesus. He had sought to destroy the child of the

woman—Israel ; and when he had been foiled in that attempt, then had followed “war in heaven,” the end of which was that the dragon was “cast down to the earth.” Cast down from heaven, he proceeds to persecute the woman, in whom the Apostle now recognises the Church of Christ, and “to make war with the rest of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus.” And he does this by giving power to “the beast.” But the twelfth chapter does yet more than provide this explanation of the source of the beast’s authority: it sets forth the supremely important fact that for all his power on earth, and the dreadful cruelty with which he exercises it, the dragon has been overthrown in heaven ; it follows that he must ere long be overthrown on earth. In heaven there is already great joy over the casting down of the “accuser of the brethren” : then the song of triumph is already heard : “Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom, of our God, and the authority of his Christ.” And though there must needs be “woe for the earth,” it is only “for a short time.” By setting this ancient vision-prophecy in advance of his own vision of the two monsters, St. John does the best that could be done to kindle the courage of those who have to face such a future. The effect of the two



chapters taken together is indeed to present in a highly pictorial form the exact situation described by Christ: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The enmity of the defeated Satan wreaks itself upon the Church of his Vanquisher through the power and cruelty of the first monster; and the power of the first monster is promoted and his cruelty abetted by the second monster which is here described. Now, these strange figures stand for very real things, for forces and personalities which were only too real for the Christians of Asia Minor at the end of the first century; but these again may be recognised as the incarnation of "spiritual wickedness" which did not cease to be active when the forces of the first century passed away, but moves in other forces and it may be in other personalities which are no less real in this twentieth century. We have to find what these figures meant for the writer and the first readers of the Apocalypse, and the question of what they respectively stand for, leads us on to a field of study, which, though it may be unfamiliar, is nevertheless of fascinating interest.

Before proceeding, however, to the explanation of these figures, it may be well to deal with a possible objection coming from those to whom the attempt to find any explanation may seem

hopeless if not absurd. These apocalyptic figures are so bizarre, in some of their details so fantastic, that they resemble what indeed they purport to be, the contents of a dream or a vision; a beast with ten horns and seven heads, with diadems the horns, and upon the heads "names of blasphemy," is a figure as difficult to take seriously as it is remote from experience. Do not such figures by their very incoherence warn us off from any attempt to find a meaning for them, other than as adding, perhaps, to the impression of horror and catastrophe? To such objections the answer is provided by even a cursory examination of the other books which belong to the apocalyptic class. There we find that figures such as these, and even more fantastic ones, play an even greater part than they do in the Apocalypse of St. John; that they belong, in fact, to a system of conventional symbolism which was employed by these writers for the purpose of conveying quite definite ideas. This is placed beyond doubt by the interpretation of the symbols, by which in several cases they are accompanied. The earliest case both of the use of such symbols and their interpretation is found in the apocalyptic portion of the Book of Daniel. There, in the seventh chapter, we have a vision of four monsters, a lion with eagle's wings, one "like a bear," one like a leopard, and one with ten horns; and the explanation is added: "These

great monsters, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth" (vii. 17); and, "The ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise" (vii. 24). Whether this passage in Daniel was the earliest instance of the use of this symbolism, or not, there can be no doubt that it became the source or model of much subsequent writing of the same kind. Each successive writer of an Apocalypse was to some extent an interpreter of earlier apocalyptic predictions. And he indicated his interpretation largely by the way in which he handled the traditional symbols, by alterations and modifications which he introduced into the pictures left by one or other of his predecessors. In the fourth Book of Ezra, an Apocalypse which was written about the same time as the Revelation of John, we find this kind of symbolic writing most highly developed. Here are a succession of visions in which birds and animals of monstrous shape appear; and each of them is followed by an interpretation given by an angel. To take only one example. An eagle is seen rising out of the sea, which has three heads, twelve wings, and eight "secondary" wings. A voice proceeding out of the body commands the wings to awake at their proper time, but the heads to sleep for the present. The wings accordingly awake, and "reign," the earlier ones for longer, the later

ones for shorter, periods, and then disappear. Then the heads are roused; the middle one devours some of the "secondary" wings, and disappears, whereupon one of the others destroys the third. Then a lion is seen which rebukes the eagle, and announces that judgment is about to overtake it.

The interpretation of this vision, which is given by the angel, will show the way in which these apocalyptic symbols were used. "The eagle whom thou sawest rising up out of the sea, is the fourth kingdom which appeared to thy brother Daniel in his vision; it is true, it was not so interpreted to him as I am now to interpret it to thee." The twelve wings are then explained to mean "twelve kings" who are to reign one after another. The eight "secondary" wings are also kings, but kings whose reigns are to be short. The three heads represent three kings who are to rule with more energy and do more mischief than all the rest. The "disappearance" of one head signifies that that king is to die in his bed. The other two are to die by the sword. "The lion, however, which burst forth out of the wood before thine eyes, with a mighty roar, who spoke to the eagle, and rebuked it for all its sins, that is the Messiah whom the Most High hath kept unto the end of the days, who shall arise and stand forth from the seed of David."

Assisted by this interpretation, modern scholars have recognised in the eagle the Roman Empire ; in the twelve wings, twelve emperors, beginning with Cæsar ; in the "secondary" wings like pretenders to the throne, or, more probably, local governors of Syria and Egypt ; and in the three heads, the Emperors Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. Thus, in an Apocalypse, which is practically contemporary with our own we find figures and statements made about them which are of the same type as those which meet us here ; and we find also that the central figure is a symbol for the Roman Empire, its wings symbols for emperors and rulers, and the things which happen to them symbolic expressions of what has happened or is to happen to the persons they represent. We see further that the special contribution of any one writer of an Apocalypse may have to be sought, not in the main figures, which form, as it were, the common basis of apocalyptic tradition, but in the modification which he introduces. The monster in Daniel has "ten horns" ; if the monster here has "seven heads" as well, the addition is made with definite purpose, in order to bring the figure into relation with a new historical situation. It is clear, therefore, that we are justified in looking for an explanation of these figures and of the special features by which they are distinguished.

They represent political or social realities, and their action reproduces the action of forces by which the Christians were, or were to be, seriously affected.

"I (or he) stood on the shore of the sea," on the shore of the Mediterranean, "and I saw a monster coming up out of the sea," that is as a power whose seat was in the West. The monster was "like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion." Plainly the writer had before his mind the vision of Daniel, and means to suggest that this new power combines in itself the forces and qualities of the world-empires which had gone before, the Babylonian, the Median, and the Persian. The power which does so at the end of the first century and takes the place of Daniel's four kingdoms as controlling the earthly destinies of God's people, is the Roman Empire. The monster has ten horns and seven heads. These represent kings (xvii. 10), in this case Roman "Emperors." Upon the horns are diadems, upon the heads "names of blasphemy." The distinction gives a possible clue to the respective significance of the heads and the horns. The ten horns represent the whole of the ten rulers of the Empire who wore the crown; the seven heads, those of the ten who bore also the "names of blasphemy," that is, those who



reigned long enough to have temples erected in their honour under the name of "The Divine Augustus." It is not certain whether the reckoning of the "ten" is to begin from Augustus, or from Julius Cæsar; but in either case three of the number (Galba, Otto, and Vitellius) reigned only for a few months; and it is not probable that worship was demanded from the Christians of Asia Minor for their names as it was for the others.

The most striking detail in this picture is the statement that one of the heads was "as though it had been smitten unto death; and his death-stroke was healed." The clue to the meaning of this symbol is to be sought in connection with the passage in xvii. 10, 11, where we are told that of the seven kings, "the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven." In the one case, one of the heads is apparently smitten unto death, but its death-stroke is healed. In the other case, one of the seven, who is described as, *par excellence*, the monster, was, and is not, but is to revive or re-appear, to rank as the eighth of the series. In both these passages we have an allusion to the same legend in slightly different forms. The death of the Emperor Nero

took place under somewhat mysterious circumstances, and shortly afterwards the rumour became widely prevalent that he was not really dead, but had escaped, and was in the East biding his time, in order to return and recover his throne. The story remained current until the end of the century, and when it was no longer probable that Nero was alive, it took the form of an expectation that he would return from the dead to wreak vengeance on his enemies.

It is Nero, then, who is represented by "the wounded head," and though the monster stands in the first place for the Imperial power, yet as it was in Nero that this power had specially concentrated itself against the Christians, he is represented by the monster itself. It was he who had made Rome "drunken with the blood of the martyrs." The language of St. Augustine shows how such a representation of his character was justified. "It was Nero Cæsar who was the first to reach the summit, and, as it were, the citadel, of this vice; for so great was his licentiousness that one would have thought there was nothing manly to be dreaded in him: and such his cruelty, that, had not the contrary been known, no one would have thought there was anything effeminate in his character."\* It is not difficult to understand how to John, Nero

\* Augustine : *De Civitate*, v. 19.

seemed to gather up into himself all the evil personality of the empire in its relation to the Church, and so was capable of being symbolised by the monster itself. And at the end of this chapter the Apostle gives as "the number of the beast," a number which half conceals and half reveals the name of Nero.

The possibility of a number standing for a name depends, of course, on the fact that both in Hebrew and in Greek the letters of the alphabet did duty also as numerals, so that every name, and, indeed, every word, had a certain numerical value arrived at by adding together the values of the letters of which it was composed. As to this particular number, 666, there are few names of persons prominent in history which cannot, by some means or other, be made to yield that as the total value of their component letters. Mohammed, Luther, and Napoleon have all been seriously suggested. There are, however, only two names which deserve consideration. One is *Lateinos*, the Greek form of *Latinus*, which might conceivably describe the Roman Emperor or race. But there is no actual case of the word occurring in this form, and even if there were, it would be a curious designation to choose for either the Roman race or the Roman Emperor. The most probable explanation is that which finds in the

mystic number the name of "Nero Cæsar" spelt in Hebrew letters. The choice of the Hebrew form is probably due to the writer's desire to fit this name to a number which was already connected with some manifestation of Antichrist. Contemporary Christian (?) speculation had discovered that the numerical value of the name "Jesus" was 888, and 666 was a number symbolically fitted to represent Antichrist.

The first monster, therefore, represents the Imperial Power of Rome, incarnate in the persons of the successive emperors, but specially in Nero, and in the case of seven of them at least, actually demanding worship from their subjects as being gods on earth; and the dread was that, if Nero returned to the throne, the pressure and the recklessness of this demand would be indefinitely increased. In a word, the shape taken by the monstrous power of evil when this book was written was that hideous travesty of religion, Emperor-worship, to which we have already found frequent allusion in the letters to the seven Churches. Other forms of heathenism and idolatry might be avoided by the Christians at the cost only of social ostracism and petty persecution; but this, the public acknowledgment of the Emperor as God, was enforced as the test of loyalty and good citizenship. It was the refusal of the Christians to conform to this imperial worship

that "formed the test by which they could be detected, and the reason why they were outlawed; their refusal was interpreted as a proof of disloyalty and treason, for it was a refusal to acquiesce in, and be members of, the imperial unity." Of this we find striking evidence, dating from early in the second century, in the letter of Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, where we read: "As for those who said they neither were nor ever had been Christians, I thought it right to let them go, since they recited a prayer to the gods at my dictation, made supplication with incense and wine to your statue, which I had ordered to be brought into court for the purpose together with the images of the gods, and, moreover, cursed Christ, not one of which things (so it is said) those who are really Christians can be made to do." No! for in their eyes to "make supplication with incense and wine to the statue" of a man was utter blasphemy and idolatry, and the image of the Emperor set up in a temple for the worship of men was "the Abomination of Desolation standing where it ought not."

The power of the first monster is supported and enforced upon men by the second monster. This the Apostle sees "coming up from the land"; it was indigenous in Asia. "He maketh the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast." It is possible that as the first

monster stands for the Imperial Power in its blasphemous claim to be worshipped, so the second may stand for the Provincial Government, whose business it would be, especially in Asia, to foster and enforce this worship in every possible way. The sentence, "He executeth all the authority of the first beast in his sight," may be thought to support this. And this is the view taken by Professor Ramsay, who sees in the two horns of this monster a reference to the "double aspect of civil and religious administration." "The provincial administration organised the State religion of the emperors. The imperial regulation that all loyal subjects must conform to the State religion and take part in the imperial ritual, was carried out according to the regulations framed by the Commune, which arranged the ritual, superintended and directed its performance, ordered the building of temples and the erection of statues, fixed the holidays, and so on." \*

The present writer is still inclined to think that the second monster stands for the priests of the imperial cult, attached to the imperial temples. The "horns like a lamb" by which it is distinguished would then be an allusion to the mitred head-dress of these priests, and verses 13-15 would receive a natural interpreta-

\* Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 97.



tion adequate to the emphatic position which they occupy. "He doeth great signs, that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men. And it was given unto him to give breath unto it, even to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed." The allusion is doubtless to pretended miracles and temple trickery by which these priests imposed upon the credulity of the people. The use of such means was only too common in the pagan religions of the time, although there is no other evidence that it was employed to promote the imperial worship. Magicians were held in high esteem, such as Simon the magician in Cyprus, Apollonius of Tyana, Apelles of Ascalon at the court of Caligula; and they maintained their reputation by the performance of pretended miracles of a similar kind. Of Simon it was related that he caused statues to move and lifeless things to come alive. The fact that in xvi. 13 the "false prophet" appears to be a synonym for the second beast, confirms this explanation. It represents the organised priesthood of the imperial cult, who used force and persuasion and "magic" besides in order to "make the earth and them that dwell therein worship the first beast."

As a means of distinguishing the worshippers of the Emperor from those who refused to conform, it is here suggested that these priests had secured, or would proceed to secure, the actual branding of all such with a "mark" upon the hand or the forehead. "He causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand or upon their forehead." It is not necessary to discuss the many guesses that have been made as to the meaning of this "mark of the beast." The most hopeful have been those which connect it with the branding of slaves or soldiers, or the tattooing of caste-marks or emblems of a god. The mark evidently contains or consists in the name or the number of the beast, has some special reference to the Emperor who is associated with the beast, and is capable of being appealed to in connection with buying and selling. "Marks," literally "charagmata," which fulfil these conditions have recently been discovered, impressed by seals upon papyrus documents found in Egypt. A representation of one of them will be found in Deissmann's *Bible Studies*.<sup>\*</sup> These seals were inscribed with the name of the reigning Emperor and with the year of his reign; some of them probably contained

\* See Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, p. 241 ff.

his effigy; and they were used on documents connected with buying and selling. It cannot be said that the use of these seals on legal documents wholly explains the language of this passage; it does not account for the receiving of the mark upon the hand or the forehead. But it may well have provided the basis for such a prophetic anticipation. Or, if the use of such a seal were made imperative in buying and selling (and its use might be arbitrarily extended as a means of persecution), and if the use of it were felt by the Christians to be a tacit acknowledgment of Emperor-idolatry, it is not difficult to understand how those who made use of it in trade might be said to have accepted the mark of the beast, and how those who refused might find it impossible to buy or sell. And however the mark itself is to be explained, it is clear that it was used, or to be used, in connection with "some unknown, but not in itself improbable, attempt, either through official regulation or informal 'boycott' to injure the Asian Christians by preventing dealings with traders and shopkeepers who had not proved their loyalty to the Emperor." \*

This, then, is the meaning of this twofold vision. It represents in symbolic but most

\* On the whole question of the mark and the mode of it, see Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 105, ff.

impressive form the grim reality with which the Christians of the period, and especially those in Asia, were engaged, in a conflict which must be fatal to one or to the other; and the equally real force of a venal priesthood which employed the arts of deception and tyranny in order to strengthen the authority of Emperor-worship. Neither is it difficult to see how both the one symbol and the other are typical of other forms in which the same spirit has taken shape. Emperor-worship was perhaps the grossest and most flagrant case of the one; but it is not by any means the only occasion in history in which men have sought to prostitute the religious instinct to the service of political ambition, when the State or the Church has ventured to claim for itself the authority, and in some sense even the worship, which belong to God alone. And those who see in the Papacy of the Middle Ages one of the incarnations of this spirit, have a great deal to say for their opinion. When the Pope declared that he was the "Vicar of God" upon earth, and claimed to govern men's consciences, opinions, and conduct by a fiat as absolute as if it were divine; when the Papacy set up false forms of worship and idolatrous images throughout Europe, and persecuted to the death those who felt such things to be blasphemous and derogatory to the honour of

God—the parallel to what is here described is too close to be denied. And such a power asserting itself over against God has never been without its willing instruments, its venal servants, who engineer the great deception and enforce the human tyranny. And again the parallel is too clear to be overlooked between the priesthood which served and enforced Cæsar-worship in Asia Minor, and the priesthood which in the Middle Ages served the Papacy, inventing or adopting many a trick by which the superstitious were beguiled into a false religion—the winking virgins, the blood-stained hosts, the cottage carried through the air, the blood liquefying once a year, and so forth—all designed and contributing to establish the authority of a system which confuses religion and politics. And it is not a little strange that the very land where this Cæsar-worship and this Cæsar-priesthood flourished, proves to be the original home of one at least of these false worships, which Rome has engrafted on the Christian faith, the worship of the Virgin Mary.

But we must not rest satisfied with recognising these forms alone as incarnations of the same evil spirit which was manifested in these monsters; there are others which are more nearly akin to our own modes of thought, for which we ourselves have more responsibility. From time to time

the "Spirit of the Age," as it is called, is one hostile to God, to Christ, and to righteousness, and it is found taking shape in some system of thought, some convention of opinion, or some tyranny of social custom. In our day it is materialism in its many forms, in reckless pursuit of pleasure, in scornful contempt of duty, in hideous denial of all that is spiritual in man. This is the idol set up for men to worship; and those who refuse or hesitate are made to suffer in their comfort and opportunities, if not in their reputation and person. Crowds of thoughtless or unscrupulous men press into the service of the idol's priesthood. By speech and pen, in books and journals, and in less open ways, they seek to establish the authority of the evil thing. They pursue with scorn and hatred those who refuse to fall down and worship the golden image. They employ all the tricks of language and sophistical argument to inveigle even the servants of God into disloyalty to Him and His cause. And with some they succeed. On all the pressure is very great to "worship the beast."

Now, what has this book to say regarding these things? First, "here is the patience and faith of the saints." God calls upon His people to endure the tyranny, if need be, of public opinion hostile to His cause; the scorn, if need



be, of many who seem to be leaders of our time ; the loss, it may be, which is involved in loyalty to Christ and righteousness. Here is the faith of the saints, the evidence of their conviction that the Lord reigneth, that "there is a city bright, whose gates are closed to sin," that to be right with God is better than to enjoy the favour of men. And here is the patience of the saints, their opportunity of steady endurance, of manifesting and developing that quality by which they "win their souls."

And, secondly, the book teaches, with vivid reiteration, that all these things are marked for destruction, total and final. In a later vision the prophet sees how "the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought signs in his sight wherewith he deceived them that received the mark of the beast ; and they twain were cast into the lake of fire."

"The wages of sin is death"; and the systems of falsehood and iniquity, the most imposing empires of worldliness, carry in them the seeds of sure destruction, a destruction which involves those who have wilfully surrendered themselves to be their servants. The wages of sin is death, but "the gift of God is eternal life."

## ANTICIPATORY VISIONS OF THE JUDGMENT

REV. xiv.

THIS chapter is apt to give much perplexity to the attentive reader, and it certainly raises insuperable difficulties in the way of those who look for one sequence of events from the beginning to the end of the Revelation, or at any rate from the beginning of the fourth chapter. That there is no such sequence we have already found reason to think; what sequences there may be are brief and self-contained; their relation to one another is not consecutive, but is governed and explained by the vision-origin and vision-character of the whole, by the fact that the Apostle is describing things which he has seen as in a picture.\* In this chapter we have a series of brief paragraphs, describing different episodes in the vision of the End. When we reach its close, it appears once more as if there were nothing more to follow, except the winding-up of judg-

\* See above, p. 184 f.

ment. We have seen the Lamb upon Mount Zion attended by a great company of the redeemed; we have heard four angels each making a proclamation which seems to be final; we have seen "one like unto the Son of man" coming on the clouds of heaven, and casting his sickle to the earth for the harvest of Judgment; we have seen even the treading of "the wine-press of the wrath of God." And yet when we pass on to the next chapters, we are to find the long series of judgments connected with the pouring of the bowls, a vision of Babylon still standing, and the going forth of Christ to the final conflict and victory.

The verse which from one point of view raises the difficulty in the most acute form, really points out the true explanation. "And another, a second angel, followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, which hath made all nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (verse 8). Solemn proclamation is made that Rome, the incarnation of the spirit of Babylon, has fallen from her high place. Nevertheless, in the seventeenth chapter, we come to a vision of the same city seated on the seven hills, and in all her power and splendour; and in the eighteenth chapter, after this proclamation has been repeated, we have the Triumph-song over Babylon as newly fallen. Only one explanation

is possible. This is one of the salient features in the great vision-picture of the future which the Apostle has seen, and in this chapter he takes, as it were, a comprehensive sweep, gathering up and recording this and others of the salient points, some of which he afterwards returns to describe in fulness of detail. It is analogous to the process which Browning saw in the history of the Gospels. There, "what first were guessed as points, are now seen stars." Here, the points are seen and registered, which are afterwards to be expanded and described on a larger scale.

Bearing this in mind, we escape the necessity that would otherwise be felt of fitting these visions into a consecutive scheme. The contents of some of them will be found to recur; others do not present themselves again; they all form part of the vision of the End. The first of these, in which we see "the Lamb standing on the Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, bearing his name, and the name of his Father, upon their foreheads," probably owes its place here to that principle of contrast which is so effective in the construction of the Apocalypse. The previous chapter has contained a terrible picture of the forces which were arrayed against the Church of Christ, the first monster and the second monster, and behind them both the dragon. The Church had already

suffered for her loyalty to the testimony of Jesus ; but it was part of the Apostle's message that the pressure and persecution were to become yet more severe. "No man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, even the name of the beast, or the number of his name." If the sword and the lion failed to drive the Christian into dishonour, the simple method of starvation would be tried : and so great would be the misery that "all that dwell on the earth shall worship the beast, every one whose name hath not been written in the book of life of the Lamb " (xiii. 8).

To this picture of the impending tribulation so dark and menacing, the Apostle sets in contrast that portion of his vision in which the peace and security of the redeemed are displayed. Not all of the redeemed are here thought of or described, but a special number and a special class. The identity of the number here with the number of "the sealed" in the first half of chapter vii. has led to attempts being made to explain both passages as concerned with the same persons ; but the recognition of the former passage as one of the writer's quotations from Jewish literature removes the last reason for pressing this identity. The 144,000 here belong to the Apostle's own circle of thought ; they are not all the redeemed, for these are "a multi-

tude whom no man can number"; neither is the number of them to be taken literally; it expresses a body of men which is large, complete, and compact. They belong to a special class in the Church, those who are "virgins," and have lived a life of ascetic chastity. These clauses are certainly to be taken in their literal sense, and as representing a high estimate of Christian asceticism. The reason for such an estimate is probably to be found in the reaction against the prevailing corruption of heathenism, and, within the Church, in the desire to find a counterpoise to the false teaching, the "doctrine of Balaam," which had invaded several of the churches. This company is seen gathered round the Lamb on Mount Zion. Whether this is to be thought of as the earthly or the heavenly Jerusalem is not easy to decide. Probably it is the former, and the underlying idea is that those who have made their breach with the corruption of the world complete, walk with Christ in perfect security, whatever tribulation or persecution may befall. They "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." If we are to think of them as not yet glorified through death, they are those who are privileged, while yet on earth, to "dwell in the secret place of the Most High." And as they have refused to receive upon their foreheads the mark of the beast, they bear the



name of Christ and the name of the Father conspicuously upon them.

Asceticism, like "having all things in common," and some other things in the early Church, may have had its place as a temporary expedient, a testimony which even a blind world could not ignore, to the Christian standard of self-control. But it forms no part of the permanent Christian ideal. Against the particular form of it referred to here St. Paul had once and again to raise a warning voice:\* and even in this book the recognition and consecration of the marriage-state is to be inferred from the imagery of chaps. xxi. and xxii. But there is a deep truth expressed through the vision. Beneath a form which had only a temporary justification, we see the determination to make complete surrender to Christ, and to keep oneself "unspotted from the world" at all costs. And this is still the secret of facing a hostile world, of enduring persecution and temptation, and all the time walking with Christ upon the Mount of God. And they who thus refuse the badge of the world's favour do receive the great names upon their hearts, the acknowledgment by God, first secret and then manifest to all, that they are His. It is they also who can learn "the new song" which is sung "before the throne." Even

\* 1 Tim. iv. 3, *cf.* v. 14; 1 Cor. vii. 9, 28.

as they walk the dusty ways of the world, and cannot but hear its voices of contempt or menace, the music of this song steals down into their hearts, and they are at peace.

Of the four proclamations which follow (verses 6 to 13), the first three, each of which is made by an angel, announce the imminence or the certainty of judgment, the fourth pronounces the blessedness of those who from the moment that judgment begins, "die in the Lord." What is meant by the phrase "an eternal gospel," is plain from the account of the angel's message in verse 7. It is not "the Gospel" in the sense which has become technical in the Church, but a proclamation of the nearness of judgment, and a summons to fear and worship God. The use of the word "gospel" and the burden of the message are closely parallel to the passage at the beginning of St. Mark, describing the opening of our Lord's ministry.\* Jesus came into Galilee "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, Repent ye, and believe in the gospel." In both cases the near approach of the Divine event was the "good news"; and those who received it as such would testify thereto by showing repentance and the fear of God, and worshipping Him in faith.† To this general announcement that "the hour of judgment is come," there

\* Mark i. 14, 15.

† Cf. also Acts xiv. 15.

succeed two proclamations of judgment in particular cases. The first, referred to above, announces that "Babylon is fallen"; the second pronounces the doom of those who worship the beast and receive his mark upon their forehead. No man can escape from bearing either "the mark of the beast," or "the name of Christ and the name of his Father." And as the blessedness of the latter is great and manifest, so also is the penalty to be borne by the former, in the day when the judgment is set. The imagery in which this penalty is described is almost wholly derived from the Old Testament, and ultimately from the manner of destruction which fell upon Sodom, or from the daily spectacle, seen from Jerusalem, of the destruction of all manner of corrupt things in the valley of Tophet.\* But the Apocalypse itself supplies the parallel to one feature in the description ("They have no rest day and night"), and the contrast is a poignant one: "They have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord" (iv. 8). Thus, "immediately before the great decisive struggle the writer holds up before the eyes of the faithful the fate of every one who succumbs in the conflict with the beast. The Apocalypse is a declaration of war against the worship of the Cæsars" (Bousset). The proclamation closes with the

\* Cf. Is. xxx. 33; xxxiv. 8-10: Deut. xxix. 23: Job xviii. 15.

arresting words, "Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." Here and now is the patience, the endurance, of the saints to approve itself. The moment has arrived when the prophecy is about to pass into realisation. He whose name is not written in the Lamb's book of life will worship the beast. Let men make their choice. The opportunity of choice is fast running out. And let those who have chosen Christ, and by Him been chosen, not be surprised when they are laid hold of by the civil power. Neither let them resist. "If any man is for captivity, into captivity he goeth: if any man killeth with the sword, with the sword must he be killed" (xiii. 10). "That is to say, let there be no armed, fruitless, and unbelieving resistance, but submission. Herein shall show itself the faith and endurance of the saints. These words would make plain to the reader, who was not yet aware of it, what terrible actuality there was for him in this prophecy. It is no question of things belonging to later times: to-morrow or to-day may see the test applied to thee." \*

The fourth proclamation (v. 13) stands in closest relation with that which precedes it. "Blessed are the dead who from now onwards die in the Lord." Whatever more general

\* Johannes Weiss, *loc. cit.*, p. 20.

significance we may now attach to these words, they have a special meaning for those to whom they were first addressed. The alternative to worshipping the beast would, in many cases at least, be death; the Apostle does not ignore that; rather is he anxious to make it plain. But to die for Christ's sake and in Christ would "from henceforth," from the point when the final struggle has begun, have a new blessedness attached to it. Up to this point, the souls even of the martyrs beneath the altar of God are crying "with a great voice," saying, How long? (vi. 10); and as they have been exhorted to wait "yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also which should be killed, should be fulfilled" (vi. 11), so for their fellow-servants then was this special privilege that the bliss which awaited them would be at once complete.\* "The harvest of the earth is about to be reaped; the vintage of the earth is about to be gathered. At this time it is that the complete blessedness of the holy dead commences: when the garner is filled, and the chaff cast out. And that not because of their deliverance from any purgatorial fires, but because of the completion of this

\* That these two classes of martyrs were clearly differentiated by the writer, is plain from the care with which he specifies both in xx. 4: "them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus," and "such as worshipped not the beast."

number of their brethren, and the full capacities of bliss brought in by the resurrection" (Alford). Such a representation of the condition of the blessed dead is inevitable so long as we continue to think of them under the conditions of time. They cannot but watch with eager, anxious interest the struggle which still goes on upon earth; if we are to run our race conscious of that "great cloud of witnesses," we cannot think of them as indifferent to the issue. And even the perfect certainty which they may have that the victory will lie with their Lord and with His Church, may not cover the question, Who will stand, and who will fall? It is only when we realise the timelessness of a spiritual existence that we can think of their bliss as complete "without us" (Heb. xi. 40), even while the struggle is going on below, and the issue of individual human choice still hangs in the balance.

These proclamations fitly issue in the descriptions of the Judgment which follow, descriptions which are brief and anticipatory, as explained above. "And I saw, and behold, a white cloud; and on the cloud one sitting like unto the Son of man." There can be no doubt that in this figure we are to see the Lord Christ Himself returning in glory to judge the world. It is the same figure as that which John saw at the beginning of his vision (i. 12), though the attitude and attire



are different. It was under this description that Jesus had chosen to present Himself to men ; it was in this form that He had told His disciples to expect His final return : " Hereafter, ye shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven." John sees the Jesus whom he had known returning in more than Messianic glory. On His head is the diadem of royal majesty, and in His hand " a sharp sickle." It might give us a moment's perplexity to find that this majestic figure apparently waits for a signal from an angel ere He casts His sickle to the earth ; and yet the representation is in consonance with our Lord's own word : " Of that day and that hour, knoweth no man, neither the Son of man, but my Father only." The angel of verse 15 is the messenger of the Father, who is sent to tell the Son of man that " the hour to reap is come." " And he that sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth ; and the earth was reaped." The detailed description of how the earth is to be reaped is to be sought elsewhere in the Revelation ; what follows the reaping is described in xx. 11-15.

" The reapers are the angels " ; \* but the harvest is not complete when the corn has been reaped ; the vintage remains, and the vision goes on to describe how that is gathered in. Nothing from which fruit can properly be expected is

\* Matt. xiii. 39.

omitted from the harvesting of God. Just as the description of the earth's reaping recalls the imagery of our Lord's parable of the tares, so that of the "vintage" is coloured by reminiscences of passages in the Old Testament. Isaiah's great parable of "the vineyard of the Lord of hosts" had made familiar the idea of Israel's responsibility to yield fruit for her Maker; and the gathering of the vintage had long been a symbol for the summons to judgment. In the imagery of the twentieth verse, however, for which there is no parallel in the Old Testament, the Seer may have been following later developments of the Jewish tradition, in which "the winepress of the wrath of God" was located, like the valley of Hinnom, "outside the city." There is a striking parallel to the rest of the verse in the Book of Enoch: "From dawn to sunset they shall slay one another, and the steed will go up to the breast in the blood of the sinners, and the waggon sink in to all its height, . . . and the Most High will arise in that day, to hold the great judgment over all sinners." Thus, the details of this vision, like much of the book as a whole, appear to take their colouring from each of the three schools in which the Apostle has been a pupil, the prophecies of the Old Testament, the Jewish Apocalypse, and the teaching of his Master while on earth. But the centre of the vision is that same Master, returning to com-

mence, without further delay, the harvest and vintage of the earth.

The question has been raised whether this reaping and vintage represent the ingathering first of the saints, and then of the wicked, or whether both represent the gathering of all men alike. Dean Alford answers, with considerable hesitation, that the harvest is the ingathering of the saints, and the vintage the assembling of the wicked for judgment. So, too, Dr. Milligan. But the passage in Joel (iii. 13), to which this is closely parallel, makes both harvest and vintage to be figures of judgment, in which no such distinction is drawn; and Jeremiah also (li. 33) speaks of the "harvest" as the time of God's vengeance. No such distinction between vintage and harvest is suggested in our text, and the recognition of the fact that this is only an anticipatory prediction of what is afterwards to be more fully disclosed, makes it unnecessary for us to seek for any classification here. Harvest and vintage together represent the gathering of all mankind before the judgment-seat of God. The separation of the tares from the wheat is not yet, but immediately to follow. The winepress is trodden, but the marriage-supper has still to be described. What the Apostle would fix our attention on here is the twofold fact of Christ's return as Judge, and the certainty that "we must all appear before his judgment-seat."

## THE FALL OF BABYLON—ROME

REV. xvii.—xix. 10

THE pouring of the seventh bowl, which is recorded at the end of the sixteenth chapter, brought to a close the threefold vision of Judgment; it is followed by a great voice out of the Temple, saying, "It is done"; and, however we may interpret the connection between the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, we naturally expect that after this the end must follow swiftly. But instead of the rapid winding up of history, and of the Book of Revelation, together, we find the book taking, as it were, a new start, and the visions of judgment being further unrolled in a new series which occupies the five following chapters. We have the vision of the great harlot and her destruction (xvii.—xix. 10), the vision of the returning and victorious Christ (xix. 11—xx.), and the vision of the New Jerusalem (xxi.—xxii. 5). Before examining the first of these new visions, we have to consider the relation of this new and unexpected expansion of the book to that central part in which the prediction of judg-

ment seems to be already complete. This is the more important because this relation is not the same as that which connects the three series of the central vision one with the other. In explanation of the strange phenomenon that whereas each of these series brings us to the verge of the end, but only to make way for a new one, it has been suggested that this is in accordance with the method of God in history, namely, that from time to time judgment falls on men and nations, judgment which seems to be final (and *is* final for some age or for some individual), but the end is not yet; the world begins again; its life goes on outwardly as before. There has been what we call a "crisis," though we seldom remember that a crisis means a "judgment," a sifting and classifying of men, a dismissing of some into outer darkness, a determination of destiny by character. There has been *a* judgment, but its scope is not universal, and it is followed not by the final end, but by a new era of the Divine discipline of men or of a man.

But this explanation does not apply to the connection between that central vision and these chapters which follow it. The germ of each of the later visions is contained in what has gone before; they are expansions of features in the earlier description which were only lightly

touched. We shall, in fact, find the clue to the connection of these chapters with the foregoing in the truly pictorial character of the writer's experience and of his book. The effect of this will be evident if we imagine one attempting to describe any famous picture which happens to contain many figures, groups, and distinct though connected episodes. Let us suppose it was Michael Angelo's great picture in the Sistine Chapel, which is an attempt to depict the Last Judgment. One look at it is sufficient to create a great and complex impression, and to fix on the memory the chief masses of the composition. You recognise what it represents; you see the great central figure of the victorious Christ dominating the whole; you take in the various groups above, below, to left and right; you understand that they represent the contrasted fate of the evil and the good; and you receive a profound impression of the awe and majesty of the scene. And all that at one glance. There is the contents of your vision, the contents of the picture as seen, but not yet studied. But suppose the vision remains; suppose you sit down before the picture and study it, examine all its various parts, see how they are connected, and how they severally contribute to the total impression. Then go away and try to describe it; you will find that your description is marked by many of the charac-



teristics which perplex us in the construction of this book. It will be an attempt to describe in a series of paragraphs what you yourself saw at one glance, and the overwhelming impression made by the whole will be continually interfering with the effort to describe the parts. The eye of memory may begin by reconstructing the groups at the base of the picture, the judgments executed upon earth ; but it would suddenly be swept obliquely upwards to recover one of the scenes in heaven ; from that it would travel downwards again to catch and record the wistful longing of men and women upon earth before whose weary hope this day is breaking with great joy, and thence across to a group of proud and self-sufficient sinners, under whose feet the earth they thought so solid is gaping to let them drop into the abyss. And, all the while, the central figure of the Judge would be asserting its imperious power to draw attention to itself. Such an attempt to describe in words this famous picture of the Judgment, if carried out on any but the most mechanical lines, would reveal many instructive parallels with features in the construction of John's Apocalypse ; and, in particular, it would throw light on the way in which not infrequently he mentions briefly some element in his vision of the future, seems to have passed from it, but, at a later point in the book, returns

to the same subject, and now describes it in full. An important illustration of this is found in connection with the Vision of the New Jerusalem, the Lamb's Bride. The detailed description of this is found in the twenty-first chapter; but already in the nineteenth chapter there are found anticipatory allusions to the Bride, the marriage, and the marriage-supper of the Lamb. Similarly, in xi. 7, we have an anticipatory reference to "the beast that cometh up out of the abyss," the full description of which is reserved for chaps. xiii. and xviii. It is the same characteristic of style which we are to recognise here, finding in it what would otherwise be perplexing. We have already heard when the seventh bowl was poured the solemn proclamation, "The cities of the nations fell; and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath" (xvi. 19): and even earlier than that St. John had heard a similar proclamation from the lips of an angel: "Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great, which hath made all nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (xiv. 8). Now, in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters he returns to that section in his Vision of Judgment to describe with great minuteness first the woman—Babylon, and then the judgment which should befall her—just as one describing Michael Angelo's

picture might come back to an episode therein which he had already mentioned, in order to describe it with a fulness of detail which makes it almost a picture by itself.

A wonderful picture it is, glowing with colour and palpitating with feeling, feeling which is almost too strong for the framework of human language and symbol in which it is enclosed. A woman, robed in garments of imperial purple and scarlet, "decked with gold and precious stones," and holding in her hand a golden cup. She is a city, seated, like Nineveh and Babylon of old, "upon many waters," and also like Rome, upon seven hills; and these seven hills again are the seven heads of the beast, nay, it is on the beast itself that she is carried, itself aglow with the imperial colour, and "full of names of blasphemy." Upon her forehead is a name written, "Mystery, Babylon the great." The word "mystery" calls attention to a symbol which requires, and has received, an interpretation. "Babylon" is the symbolic name of this city: her actual name is Rome. The "many waters" represent in her case the innumerable "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" over which Rome holds sway. The seven hills, on which, according to tradition, she is planted, represent the seven Emperors, on whose authority the city's power is broadly based. "Five of them are

fallen," Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero; "one is," namely, Vespasian; "the other is not yet come." That is to say, the vision belongs to the reign of Vespasian, the sixth Emperor; the reign of Titus his successor and its brief duration are predicted in the phrase, "When he (the seventh) cometh, he must continue (but) a little while." And once more a single one of the heads appears to absorb and concentrate to itself all the personality of the monster, and we read of the beast that "was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss," a reference to the dreaded return of Nero, who had made Rome drunken with the blood of the saints. He is one "of the seven"; and on his return he will be "the eighth." Neither is he to return alone, but with "ten kings," who are represented by the "ten horns." They have "received no kingdom as yet," but are to share the brief authority of the beast. They do not, therefore, find their antitypes in any of the Roman rulers, but most probably represent the Parthian rulers, the independent "satraps," the "kings from the sun-rising" (xvi. 12), at whose head Nero was to return. They are to hate the woman, and to make her desolate and naked, and burn her utterly with fire; but also they are to make war against the Lamb, "and the Lamb shall overcome them."

There she sits, the imperial city which is the concrete embodiment of the imperial power, full of the "names of blasphemy," the imperial titles, "Divine Augustus," not only borne by the Emperor, but repeated a thousand times on temples, statues, coins, so that the city reeked with this offence. There she sits, arrayed in the purple, glittering with the treasures amassed through centuries of conquest and commerce, but holding in her hand the cup full of abominations. What these abominations were, we learn from the pages of Tacitus, or the satires of Juvenal. Rome had been for a couple of centuries a "sink of the nations," a receptacle into which poured the offscourings of many peoples, men and women who came to minister to and prey upon, the vices and sensuality of the populace, to teach them the latest iniquities of the East. Rome, according to Tacitus, was the city "where all kinds of enormity and filthy shame meet together and become fashionable." These were her "abominations," and under Nero, whose reign had but recently closed, she had drunk to intoxication of the blood of God's saints. Again we turn to Tacitus and read: "A vast multitude were convicted, not so much of arson, as of hatred of the human race. And they were not only put to death, but put to death with insult, in that they were either dressed up in skins of beasts to perish

by the worrying of dogs, or else put on crosses to be set on fire, and, when the daylight failed, to be burnt as torches by night." These were the martyrs of Jesus, and Rome, let loose upon them by the half-crazy Emperor, was "drunken with their blood."

That is the meaning of this vision. We have spoken of it as a vision of Rome, though the name here given to the woman is not Rome, but "Babylon the great." Other interpretations have, of course, been given, for example, that she represents Papal (not Imperial) Rome, or, again, the Church herself given over to iniquity. But, whatever just applications and meanings we may afterwards find to be addressed to either of these, the first thing is to ascertain what the symbol meant for the writer of this book and for his earliest readers. And on this point there can be no doubt. In these chapters, as so frequently elsewhere, the Apostle is making use of a symbol which had acquired a certain well-defined significance for God's people in the course of their national history, a significance which had been stamped upon their consciousness by the ancient prophets of Israel.

A careful comparison of the parallel passages, especially those in Isaiah and Jeremiah, will show how much of the imagery of these chapters had formed part of the characteristics of Babylon in



the Old Testament ; and the ease with which the various elements in this description are here transferred from Babylon to Rome depends on the identity of the spirit by which the two cities are informed, the spirit of worldliness and of hostility to God and His Church. This, the essential characteristic of Babylon, has been well seized by Dr. Adam Smith in his commentary on Isaiah. " Throughout the extent of Bible history from Genesis to Revelation, one city remains, which in fact and symbol is execrated as the enemy of God and the stronghold of evil. In Genesis we are called to see its foundation, as of the first city that wandering men established and the quick ruin which fell upon its impious builders. By the prophets we hear it cursed as the oppressor of God's people, the temptress of nations, full of cruelty and wantonness. And in the Book of Revelation its character and curse are transferred to Rome, and New Babylon stands over against New Jerusalem. Babylon is the Atheist of the Old Testament, as she is the Anti-christ of the New. Her haughtiness and secure pride are the fruit of an atheistic self-sufficiency. ' I am, and there is none besides me. I shall not sit as a widow ; neither shall I know the loss of children,' are the words which the prophet puts upon the lips of the city. And the same spirit inspires the New Babylon of the Apocalypse.

She saith in her heart: 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning.' '\*

"Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death and mourning and famine"; and the vision of the woman in the seventeenth chapter is followed by a description of her overthrow in the eighteenth. Just as the picture of Rome in her pride is painted with colours which are largely borrowed from the pictures of Babylon drawn by the prophets, so also this prophetic description of her fall. It is full of reminiscences, in particular, of Isaiah's great ode upon the fallen city. "Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great." Like a trumpet heralding the approaching day of deliverance these words would fall upon the ear of the Church writhing under the oppression of blasphemous Imperialism. What inspiration it demanded, what faith in the vindicating power of the Divine righteousness, to proclaim with such triumphant certainty the overthrow of earth's mightiest power! Even the splendid power and dramatic scorn of the passage† in Isaiah find no unworthy parallel in this passage where the Seer depicts the ruin of Rome in its completeness and its shame. He lets us appreciate the greatness and the unexpectedness of the catastrophe, in-

\* See G. A. Smith: *Isaiah* ii. p. 188 ff.

† It should by all means be read and studied in the forcible and rhythmical translation given by Dr. G. A. Smith.

directly but not less effectively, by describing the surprise and dismay which overwhelm her allies, her customers, the purveyors of her luxury. "The merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no man buyeth her merchandise any more." He shows us the kings "standing afar off for fear of her torment," lest they too should be engulfed in that furnace—the merchants recalling all the invoices they had made out, and crushed with the thought that their great market was at an end—all of them, down to the slave-gatherers of the East, whose business had collapsed. Even the sailors and the shipowners, those who depended for their livelihood on Rome's great carrying trade, are seen standing afar off, wringing their hands in utter dismay. For Rome, great Rome, has fallen. And to complete the picture, still with the aid of materials supplied by the Old Testament, St. John takes his readers now into the heart of the city, where there is darkness and silence; business has stopped; music is dumb; life has fled. What a picture it is of destruction, sudden, and utter, and appalling! And it is just the picture which comes into the mind of one who walks down the echoing streets of a place like Pompeii.

It is indeed difficult to fix the point of time at which this prophecy found its fulfilment. It is almost equally difficult to say at what point of

time since the fifth century its fulfilment has not been one of the plain facts of history. Like all God's judgments it came slowly, and it came suddenly, both by evolution and by crisis. We see it working in the slow decay of political and moral force which set in from the beginning of the second century, in the paralysing effects of those social poisons which Rome had admitted into her system, slavery and lust, avarice and luxury, eating away the life of the people, until the great name and power of Rome was but a hollow shell. And then, at one blow, it collapsed. The "barbarians," the untutored, unspoilt race of the North and East, threw off their reverence for the name of Rome, and sweeping all the empire's defences before them, besieged, captured, and possessed the capital itself. The capture and sack of Rome by Alaric the Goth is probably the most striking of the many forms in which this prophecy has found its fulfilment—an event, the echoes of which reverberated throughout the known world, startling Jerome in his cell at Bethlehem, and rousing Augustine in his African bishopric to write in his *City of God* what is not only the epitaph of "Rome," but the greatest vindication of God's hand in history.

But while we may see in this event the most striking *material* fulfilment of the prophecy, we must not forget to mark its slow fulfilment also

in the overthrow of the blasphemous Emperor-worship, in the victory of the Lamb over this monstrous foe, and of the Church, which had the spirit of the Lamb, over world-powers, which to all human judgment were immeasurably its superior. And then we are led to discover the message of the vision for ourselves and for all time, the inexpugnable righteousness of God and its assured victory over all the might and seeming majesty of wickedness and wrong. But specially the prophecy has reference to the forms in which wrong and wickedness incarnate themselves in the life of great cities. Professor Adam Smith's words concerning Isaiah's prophecy on Babylon apply with equal force here: "Do not let us choke our interest in this prophecy, as so many students of prophecy do, in the ruins and dust which were its primary fulfilment. The shell of Babylon, the gorgeous city which rose by the banks of the Euphrates, has indeed sunk into heaps; but Babylon herself is not dead. Babylon never dies. To the conscience of Christ's Seer, this mother of harlots, though dead and deserted in the East, came to life again in the West. To the city of Rome in his day John transferred, word by word, the phrases of [Isaiah and Jeremiah]. Rome was Babylon so far as Rome was filled with cruelty, with arrogance, with trust in riches, with credulity in divination, with that waste of

mental and moral power which Juvenal exposed in her. But we are not to leave the matter even here; we are to use that freedom with John which John uses with the prophets. We are to pass by the particular fulfilment of his words, in which he and his day were interested, because it can only have a historical and secondary interest to us in the face of other Babylons in our own day, with which our consciences, if they are quick, ought to be busy. Some honest people continue to confine the references in the Book of Revelation to the city and Church of Rome. It is quite true that John meant the Rome of his day; it is quite true that many features of his Babylon may be traced upon the successor of the Roman Empire, the Roman Church. But what is that to us with incarnations of the Babylonian spirit so much nearer ourselves for infection and for danger than the Church of Rome can ever be? ” \*

In order to quicken and educate our own consciences in this matter, we cannot do better than go back nearly fifteen centuries, and read the passage in which Augustine described the spirit of Babylon as he saw it incarnate in Imperial Rome.

“ The worshippers and admirers of these gods

\* G. A. Smith : *Isaiah* ii. p. 199.



delight in imitating their scandalous iniquities, and are nowise concerned that the Republic be less depraved and licentious. Only let it remain undefeated, they say, only let it flourish and abound in resources: let it be glorious by its victories, or still better, secure in peace; and what matters it to us? This is our concern, that every man be able to increase his wealth so as to supply his daily prodigalities, and so that the powerful may subject the weak for their own purposes. Let the poor court the rich for a living, and that under their protection they may enjoy a sluggish tranquillity; and let the rich abuse the poor as their dependents, to minister to their pride. Let the people applaud not those who protect their interests, but those who provide them with pleasure. Let no severe duty be commanded, no impurity forbidden. Let kings estimate their prosperity, not by the righteousness, but by the servility of their subjects. Let the provinces stand loyal to the kings, not as moral guides, but as lords of their possessions and purveyors of their pleasures: not with a hearty reverence, but a crooked and servile fear. Let the laws take cognisance rather of the injury done to another man's property than of that done to one's own person. If a man be a nuisance to his neighbour, or injure his property, family, or person, let him be actionable; but in his own

affairs let every one with impunity do what he will in company with his own family and with those who willingly join him. Let there be a plentiful public supply of prostitutes for every one who wishes to use them, but specially for those who are too poor to keep one for their private use. Let there be erected houses of the largest and most ornate description: in these let there be provided the most sumptuous banquets, where every one who pleases may, by day or night, play, drink, vomit, dissipate. Let there be everywhere heard the rustling of dancers, the loud, immodest laughter of the theatre; let a succession of the most cruel and the most voluptuous pleasures maintain a perpetual excitement. If such happiness is distasteful to any, let him be branded as a public enemy: and if any attempt to modify or put an end to it, let him be silenced, banished, put an end to. Let these be reckoned the true gods who procure for the people this condition of things, and preserve it when once possessed."\*

How familiar it all sounds, and how modern! It would not require a very minute study of our public life for a single week to find nearly, if not quite all of these ideas enunciated with dogmatic certitude, and appealed to as the principles by which a people should be guided. They are the

\* Augustine, *City of God*, ii. 20.

outcome of the temper of the world in its opposition to God. And this is the temper of Babylon; and who shall dare to say that it is not the temper of much of our modern civilisation, the temper which is fostered especially in our great cities?

It is impossible that God's people should not feel the pressure and the pain of dwelling in an atmosphere infected to any great extent with a temper of this kind. They would not be God's people if they did not. But let them welcome both the pressure and the pain. They are the *stigmata*, the mark of the Lord Jesus, the weight of the Cross. And if we ask, further, What saith the Lord touching these things? here it is written in His Word, and confirmed by history: they are marked for destruction. "The Lamb shall overcome them; for he is King of kings and Lord of lords." "Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great." And while every impulse of humanity, of patriotism, of religion, combines with three-fold power to urge us to strive for the crushing, and checking, and removal of these tempers of Babylon within the body social or ecclesiastical to which we may belong, and to pray without ceasing that God may deliver us from the unclean spirits of cruelty, vanity of knowledge, vanity of wealth, lust, and luxury, forgetfulness of God and idolatry of self,—there is also that other counsel to be

remembered, "Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues," the summons which is addressed to us individually to resist the infection of the spirit of Babylon, to deny our hearts to her lures, and steel them against her threats, to know ourselves redeemed, purchased to be a people of God's own possession, to know it because, even in the midst of "a crooked and perverse generation," we "live not unto ourselves, but unto God."

#### EPILOGUE TO THE VISION OF BABYLON

REV. xix. 1-10

The twofold vision of Babylon and Babylon fallen is followed by this short section, which serves as an epilogue to chaps. xvii. and xviii., and also as a prologue to chapters which follow, and so forms the link by which these two sections of the book are connected. Viewed as an epilogue, it shows us the writer pursuing the method with which we are already familiar by setting over against the dark pictures of evil on earth which have occupied the previous chapter this glowing picture of joy and praising multitudes in heaven. We are allowed to hear the burst of praise which goes up from the heavenly hosts when

that great judgment is accomplished. There is no separation of interests between the Church militant and the Church triumphant. The struggle on earth is watched as with breathless interest by the redeemed and by the angelic beings in heaven. And to them it is given to acclaim with perfect understanding the great deeds of God. "Salvation, and glory, and power belong to our God: for true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great harlot." Once more, as in the Hymn of Creation, the Hymn of Redemption, and after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, "the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures" fall down and worship God; and the voice of a great multitude proclaims, "Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth."

These verses thus provide a pause in the action, and the summing-up in striking form of the events which have been recorded in the foregoing chapter: but also they link them with what is to follow through the mention for the first time of the great idea round which the later chapters turn. "Let us rejoice, and be exceeding glad . . . for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."\* The last verses of this paragraph sound as if they were meant to be the closing chords of the Apostle's work; but

\* See further, pp. 303 ff.

with this new and insistent note sounding through them we are prepared to find that, although it comes to a well-marked pause, it is only to move forward again with a further upward sweep towards the end.



## SEVEN VISIONS CONCERNING THE END

REV. xix. 11—xxi. 1

THE division of the Apocalypse into chapters has been peculiarly unfortunate at this point. There should certainly have been a break at the end of the tenth verse, where one of the most strongly marked pauses in the book occurs, and probably it would be better to make the section which begins here include the first verse at least of chap. xx. The earlier verses of xix., though they include a striking case of "anticipatory prediction," belong to the prophecy on Babylon, and when we pass to the eleventh verse, we find the first of a series of seven visions, closely related to one another, and all connected with various aspects of the End. All of these begin with the simple phrase, "And I saw," and all are bound by many subtle links of connection, by community of subject and of phraseology, with earlier sections of the book. If the careful reader were to underline first those phrases which have appeared in the previous

chapters and then those which are closely parallel to the language of the Old Testament, he would prepare for himself an instructive lesson.

The Apostle comes at last to describe his vision of the End. Even this, the end of the last things, was never far away for him; the beginning of them was close at hand, and the intervening process of judgment was made up of "things which must come to pass shortly," that is, swiftly as well as soon. But his survey of these intervening things is over: it is the final Judgment which now appears, and the first stage of it is the final conflict between Christ and His enemies. In the first vision (vers. 11-16) we see the figure of Christ leading forth the armies of heaven. It is through the opened heaven that He is seen, and probably on the plane of heaven that He wages war. It is not with flesh and blood that He is to engage, but with "principalities and powers," with "the rulers of the darkness of this world," with the spiritual forces which give support and authority to the forces of evil upon earth. The garment in which He is arrayed is one which has been dipped in blood; He recalls the figure in Isaiah, coming "with dyed garments from Bozrah." There the reference is to the blood of His enemies: but here the stains upon the robe are symbolic of that self-sacrifice in the power of which He goes forth to conquer. Other features

in the vision, especially those set forth in the fifteenth verse, are attributes consecrated by long tradition, as belonging to Messiah—"Out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations (Is. xi. 4) : and he shall rule them with a rod of iron (Ps. ii. 9) : and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God " (Is. lxiii. 3). But the vision has other features, for which no such parallel can be found ; and they are the names which belong to this majestic Rider. One of these is "written," but known to no one but Himself. It is useless, therefore, to speculate as to what that name might be : but there can be no little doubt as to its significance. It is not either of the names which follow, but another, a secret "name of power," representing the inmost Divine being of Christ, in the possession of which He is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him." The second name is not written, but it is known, and it is the same name by which John the Evangelist describes Him who "was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Thus both the names for Christ which are most characteristic of the Fourth Gospel, "the Lamb" and "the Word of God," are found also as names for Him in the Apocalypse, and there alone. This is not the place to discuss either the meaning or the history of this name ; but the application of it to Christ marks

the recognition of His supra-mundane and pre-existent being, as One who was "in the beginning," and "with God." The third of these names takes us yet a step further. It is open to be read of all, inscribed upon the Rider's robe and on His sword-girdle—"King of kings and Lord of lords." It is hardly necessary to point out the significance of this name, but we must weigh well what it means, that a description which in the Old Testament and in later Jewish literature was assigned to the Most High God, is here applied to Jesus returning for judgment. It would be impossible to conceive of a Jew applying this title to the Messiah, or to any being at all, except one whom he recognised as God: and when we find one who certainly belonged to the circle of Jesus' disciples, describing this as His title, we have a measure of the revolution through which his thought had passed, and also of the impression which Jesus, by His life, character, and teaching, by His death and resurrection, had made.\* Is it not the rank, and the divinity, thus repeatedly, simply, and absolutely ascribed to Jesus in the Apocalypse, which secures its hold upon Christian hearts?

The second vision (17-18) is that of an angel "standing in the sun," as the centre of the heavens from which a summons might be issued

\* See pp. 24 ff.

to all the world, and summoning "all the birds that fly in mid-heaven" to gather to the feast of the slain. It is closely parallel to a passage in Ezekiel (xxxix. 17-20): "Speak unto the birds of every sort, and to every beast of the field. Assemble yourselves and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice." It recalls also our Lord's saying, "Where the carcase is, there shall the eagles be gathered together."

This summons to a field strewn with dead is followed by a vision of the enemies of Christ going forth to meet Him (17-21). The day of Armageddon has come, and the final struggle between the armies of God and the embattled hosts of His enemies. "The kings of the earth" are those who owe their authority to the beast, or those whom he has summoned to his aid (xvii. 12-14). The vision contains no description of the conflict, but passes straight to the issue; the beast is taken, and with him the "false prophet," by whom is plainly to be understood the second monster of chapter xvii., the priesthood of the imperial cult, which wrought the signs or pretended miracles, "wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast." These are taken and "cast into the lake of fire." The destruction of the beast by fire is found in Daniel (vii. 12): "I tarried even till the beast was slain, and his body

destroyed ; and he was given to be burned with fire." The figure of a "lake of fire that burneth with brimstone" is found only in the Apocalypse ; elsewhere, in the New Testament we read of the valley of "unquenchable fire," or "the Gehenna of fire," as the doom of the wicked. Ge-henna, or the Valley of Hinnom, had been the scene of abominable sacrifices, when Ahaz and Manasseh caused their children to pass through the fire "to Moloch," and ever afterwards it was a place accursed, used for the destruction of all manner of unclean things. From the time of Isaiah onward (xxx. 33), Tophet, "the high places" of which were in the valley of the Son of Hinnom,\* was a symbol of the burning judgment of God, and used typically as the scene of its execution.

In the fourth vision we see the evil wrought by the beast and the kings in his train pursued to its source in "the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan." An angel is seen with the key of "the abyss" and a great chain in his hand ; with the chain he binds Satan, and having cast him into the abyss, seals and fastens it with the key, that there he may be kept for a thousand years. A comparison with verse 10 shows that "the abyss" is not to be understood as the place of final punishment.

\* Jer. vii. 31 ; xxxii. 15.



The word meaning "bottomless," or "the bottomless place," is connected with ideas anciently current regarding the configuration of the earth and the way it was supported. The earth being conceived as a flat disc floating on "a firmament" of waters, the "abyss" stood for the immeasurable depths beneath the earth, to which there was understood to be access by a shaft, capable of being sealed.\* The period of Satan's confinement is no doubt to be understood as corresponding with the period of the martyrs' reign "with Christ" (xx. 4), and will best be considered in connection with that.

The next vision is that of the First Resurrection, a resurrection which includes only those who have died the martyr-death. It has been maintained, to the contrary, that this resurrection includes two classes, first, those "that have been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus," and then those that "worshipped not the beast," and that the second of these classes represent men still living upon the earth, who have successfully resisted the temptations and the apostasy. But in the first place, the Apostle says that he saw "the souls" of both classes: evidently he thinks of both alike

\* See *Century Bible*, note on Rev. ix. 1, and references there. There is an interesting parallel in the prayer of Manasseh: "O Lord Almighty . . . who hast shut up the deep (the abyss), and sealed it by thy terrible and glorious name" (cit. Bousset).

as having passed into a disembodied state. And, further, he says of both classes that "they lived"; and though it might be possible to understand by that "they continued to live," if it referred to one class alone, it is most improbable that the same word is used of the two classes in the two contrasted meanings, "they came to be alive," and "they continued to live." And, thirdly, the next sentence shows that the writer is thinking only of the dead; "the rest of the dead (those that had not died the martyr-death) lived not until the thousand years should be finished." And the closing sentence of the description, "This is the first resurrection," taken in connection with the opening one, "I saw the souls," seem to leave us no alternative but to regard both classes referred to within these limits as consisting of those who had died and now were made alive.\*

Few questions in which the Apocalypse of St. John was involved have been longer or more hotly debated than this of the millennial reign of Christ, in which some of His followers are to share. That this book was appealed to in support of one view was one reason why it had so much difficulty in obtaining recognition as

\* It should be said that both Bousset and Bernhard Weiss (*die Apokalypse*, p. 519) take the opposite view, holding that those who have refused the mark of the beast and not been martyred, do also partake in the millennial reign, though not, of course, in the first resurrection.

part of the New Testament canon. There are a few other passages in the New Testament in which allusion has been found to this expectation; but here only is it distinctly formulated; among first-century writings it appears only in one other document, the Epistle of Barnabas.\* There are three points to be studied in connection with this millennial reign, the persons who are to share in it, the duration which is assigned to it, and the scene or sphere in which it is exercised, whether in heaven or upon earth. With regard to the first, the persons who are to "reign with Christ," we have stated, and given reason for, our opinion, that they are those who have died a martyr-death "for the testimony of Jesus." There is, however, a strongly supported opinion, that they include also those who, being still alive at the time of the "first resurrection," have not received the mark of the beast. On the second point, it is one of the great services rendered by Dr. Milligan to the understanding of this book that he stated so firmly the conventional nature of the time-reckoning, "a thousand years." "The fundamental principle to be kept in view is this: that the *thousand years* mentioned in this passage express no period of time. They are not a figure for the whole Christian era, now extending to nearly nineteen hundred years. Nor do they

\* Bartlett, *Apostolic Age*, p. 377.

denote a certain space of time, longer or shorter, it may be, than the present dispensation, and to be in the view of some preceded, in the view of others followed, by the Second Advent of our Lord. They embody an idea; and that idea, whether applied to the subjugation of Satan, or to the triumph of the saints, is the idea of completeness or perfection. Satan is bound for a thousand years; that is, he is completely bound. The saints reign for a thousand years; that is, they are introduced into a state of perfect and glorious victory." Apart from the general principles which guide the selection of these numbers in the Apocalypse, we may recognise here a combination of the declaration in Psalm xc. that unto God "a thousand years are as one day," with the narrative of Creation in Genesis, with the seventh day marked off as a day of rest. The time-reckoning here does not express the duration, but the character of the period. As to the third point, the sphere of the millennial reign, the chief thing to be observed is, that there is nothing to indicate whether it is on earth or in heaven that "they reign with Christ." It may be to the same class that the Apostle assigns the "thrones" of which he speaks in the beginning of the verse. In that case it is in or from heaven that they rule. And, even if that argument be precarious, the probabilities

point in the same direction. We recall the promise in the letter to Laodicea: "To him that overcometh will I give to sit with me in my throne:" a promise which is not to be understood as connected with a visible kingship of Christ upon earth. There is certainly no necessity, therefore, to create difficulties of another kind, by supposing that this vision of the future involves a "double return" of Christ to the earth. There is nothing in the passage to support that suggestion." \*

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." For that resurrection is not followed by any judgment, there being no necessity for it, and therefore "over these" the second death can have no power. It was one of the great objects of the Apostolic work to brace the courage of the Christians in Asia to meet the coming persecution with a heroism that despised death, and to that end he sets before them the glory of those who sealed their testimony with their life-blood, and the hope of this special privilege that they should be partakers in a "first resurrection," and in the reign of Christ, anterior to the final Judgment.

\* "That they reigned with Christ, by no means involves that the returning Christ remains on earth: it is also possible for Him to exercise His Messianic sovereignty, through which He restores the perfect rule of God on earth, from the throne of God." B. Weiss, *Apocalypse*, *ad loc.*

In the following verses (7, 8) St. John appears to incorporate a fragment of earlier prophecy. The sudden transition from the narrative descriptive of a vision to the prophetic future, the reference to "Gog and Magog" as symbols of a world hostile to the people of God, and the allusions to Jerusalem as the object of their attack, all point in this direction. Gog and Magog, which in Ezekiel (xxxviii.-xxxix.) stand apparently for a prince and the land over which he rules, are here conceived as two peoples, or the people of the earth regarded as divided into two; they come up in great hordes to attack "the beloved city," "the camp of the saints," \* being moved thereto by the instigation of Satan, loosed, we are not told how, from "his prison." But they are destroyed by fire "out of heaven," and the devil "which deceived them" is cast into the lake of fire.

The sixth vision (verses 11-15), brief as it is, contains all that the Revelation has to say about the Last Judgment, that great assize which is to follow the resurrection. There is no more impressive picture even in this book where such pictures abound. It says so little, and yet all is

\* The phrase "the camp of the saints" probably referred in the first instance to Israel encamped in the wilderness; cf. Deut. xxiii. 14, "thy camp shall be holy." The word is the same which is found in Heb. xiii. 13, "without the camp."



said. The throne dazzling with the whiteness of the Divine purity ; the Judge, reverently indicated, but not named ; the whole material fabric of the universe gone, fled, so that there are not even rocks which men may call upon to fall on them ; “the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne,” and, besides, nothing but the books in which their works are written, and that other book, the Book of Life. It may be asked, Who are these dead ? And the answer has been given that they are the wicked alone, that this judgment is a judgment only for condemnation. On the theory supported above, that those who partake in the first resurrection are the martyrs only, such an understanding of this passage would be hardly possible. But, apart from that, it seems decidedly improbable. In the first place, the Apostle has told us (xx. 5), “the rest of the dead lived not” at the first resurrection, and some place must be found in his vision of the future for the resurrection of those who are not included in either of the two classes described in verse 4, for those who did not have the opportunity of testifying either in life or in death by their resistance to the beast. The particular test applied to these was far from being one applied to all humanity. And it would seem that we must either narrow the scope of this vision to include only those wicked who had met this test

and failed, or extend it to include the good and bad alike. Again, this is the only representation of the final Judgment which appears to be consistent with what other passages in the New Testament would lead us to expect. In what is the closest parallel to this passage which we have we are told by Christ Himself that "all nations" shall be gathered before the Son of man, and then "he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats." \* And this, indeed, is the only view which is suggested by the wording of this passage, one which it would require very strong argument to disturb. The phrase "the small and the great," which is of frequent occurrence in the Apocalypse, is a synonym for "all men" (except where it is expressly limited—xi. 18). And no limitation is really suggested by verse 13: "The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them." On the contrary, these three seem intended to exhaust the places where the dead are to be found; the mention of the sea emphasises the Apostle's desire to convey the universal character of this resurrection and the subsequent judgment. Not even those are forgotten whose bodies man has not been able to find. Neither can it be effec-

\* Matt. xxv. 31 f.: cf. Acts xvii. 31; Rom. xiv. 10; 2 Cor. v. 10.

tively maintained that "the books" contain only the record of evil deeds, and of the evil deeds of the wicked. The idea of books containing a record of human action can be traced back to Daniel vii. 10: "The judgment was set, and the books were opened"; \* and it is nowhere indicated that only one class of deeds is recorded, or the deeds of only one class of men.

"We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." That is the fact whereof St. John has vision here. Not even those are exempt whose names are written in "the book of life." Judged according to their works alone, it might be that even "the righteous scarcely be saved." Even those who build on the true foundation may have built with "wood, hay, stubble," as well as with "gold, silver, precious stones." And even their work must be made manifest "when the day shall declare it." "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." And yet, though a man's work be destroyed, "he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." † What St. Paul sets before us under one figure, St. John does under another. The books are opened wherein is contained the record of what a man has done, good and bad. The best, the purest of men might

\* See Driver's note on the passage, and *cf.* *Psa.* lvi. 8; *Isaiah* lxxv. 6.

† 1 *Pet.* iv. 17-18; 1 *Cor.* iii. 11-15.

well shrink before such a prospect. Even were we to expect that a balance should be struck, are there many of us who would stand? But there is another book, the Lamb's Book of Life, the citizen-roll of the New Jerusalem. And it is the very glory of our Gospel that those who have humbly trusted in Christ as their Saviour may appeal from the record of their own works even as His professed disciples, to the record that they are His. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us." The letter to the Church in Sardis gives warning of the possibility that a man may so reject or forget his Saviour as to have his name "blotted out of the book of life." In such a case the appeal would be from a dark record to an erasure yet more sad. It is not because of the witness of "the books," but because his name is absent from "the book," that according to this vision a man suffers the last penalty of the second death. "Rejoice," said Jesus to His disciples, "rejoice that your names are written in heaven." For when the books are opened, the Book of Life is opened too. And still it is "according to their works" that men are judged; for "this is the will of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

## JERUSALEM FROM ABOVE

REV. xxi.-xxii. 5

THIS is the last of the visions seen by St. John in Patmos and recorded in this book, the vision of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." It is not the first time that allusion has been made to this symbolic figure and this symbolic marriage. In the burst of praise which follows on the judgment of Babylon (xix. 1-10) this is one of the notes we hear, one which specially catches the ear alike because of its novelty and of the beauty of its symbolism. "Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad . . . for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." But between that anticipatory announcement and this detailed account of the bride-city much has intervened—the description of the final Judgment, the return of Christ, the destruction of the monster, the Resurrection in its two stages, the judgment of men according to their works, and the destruction of Hades and even of Death itself. In a

word, ere this vision is described by John in all its splendour the visions of Judgment are complete; it only remains to describe "the things that God hath prepared for them that love him."

Now these are things concerning which St. Paul has told us that "eye hath not seen, neither hath ear heard them, neither have they entered into the heart of man to conceive."

And we mark at once a broad distinction between the way in which this book depicts the judgments which are to fall on earth and its inhabitants, and the way in which it describes the bliss which is to be the portion of God's own people in heaven. We have found that the judgments are depicted in terms of events which had actually occurred in history, which do occur in human experience; war civil and international, famine, plague, and pestilence, earthquake and eclipse, the poisoning of wells and devastation by locusts—these are the things, and this is the kind of thing, which supplies the Apostle with material for his description of judgment. Each of them is heightened in effect by the completeness of the subsequent ruin, by the wide area of the world's surface which is affected, or, it may be, by being traced to a hellish origin, and being revealed as the visible instrument of diabolic powers; but in their intrinsic character these judgments are all of them such things as men



know either by their own experience or by the report of others.

When we turn from these to the description of the joys and glories of heaven, the first thing we are struck with is the omission of nearly everything corresponding to the experience of enjoyment on earth. It is true, the city is described in terms of great splendour; its foundations are all manner of precious stones, its gates of pearl, its streets of gold, and the radiance which streams from it as the radiance of the diamond; but this is a description of the glory which irradiates it, as "having the glory of God." Of positive bliss for those that dwell in this heavenly city the only suggestion which is connected with the experience of men as men upon earth is found in "the tree of life, which bare all manner of fruit, and yielded her fruit every month." And that is introduced not as ministering to the appetite and sensuous enjoyment of those who dwell in the city, but as marking the removal of the previous curse, the restoration of the first condition of life in the Garden of Eden, before man was condemned to "eat bread in the sweat of his face." All the other features of the heavenly condition which are noted by John are either negative (no more sea, no more night, no more death, no more curse) or spiritual and religious ("the tabernacle of God is with men": "I will give unto him

that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely": "the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever"). These are the positive characteristics of the life of the city on which the Apostle lays all the emphasis; and they are things which have simply no meaning for the non-religious man.

There is, therefore, a striking and important contrast between the Christian anticipation of heaven as here portrayed and the non-Christian pictures of Paradise. And this is true not only of the pictures painted by the fancy of the Greeks, or by the ingenuity of Mohammed, but also of those which would be most familiar to St. John, the pictures of Paradise which are found in the later Jewish literature. Without being sensual in the evil significance of the word, as are some of the other extra-Biblical anticipations, those of the Jewish Apocalypses are largely, if not mainly, sensuous; that is to say, they delight to represent the righteous as enjoying in Paradise the pleasures of physical life which may have been denied to them on earth. The delights of heaven are painted in very earthly colours, and are set forth as consisting largely in the gratification of physical desire. The contrast in this Christian expectation of the future is all the more striking because as regards the glories of the city the description in our Apocalypse has many parallels

in the Jewish literature. In many details it follows very closely Ezekiel's vision of the ideal city;\* but it omits all of one side of what was the popular religious anticipation among Jews of the first century. The omission must have been conscious, if not deliberate. In other words, Christian thought and hope concerning the nature of the heavenly bliss do move on a higher plane; and this Apostle also had learned and comprehended the truth enunciated by St. Paul, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

St. John sets forth the heavenly habitation of God's people as a city. That is the first main feature in his vision; and it is not affected by the fact that the description he gives of the city is obviously an ideal one, one as far removed from possibility as from reality. This is seen not only in the area which the city is said to cover, thirteen hundred miles in length by thirteen hundred miles in breadth, but in the further statement that the height of it is equal to its length and breadth. When we realise that the city of John's vision is a cube in shape, and one which is thirteen hundred miles high, it becomes plain that there is, as Dr. Milligan says, an intentional "absence of verisimilitude" in the description. The dimensions of the city, like its shape and everything

\* Ezek. xl. ff.

that belongs to it, are beyond the compass of human experience. Unimaginable vastness and unimaginable glory, these are the outward characteristics which the Apostle's language should impress upon our minds. But though its outward form and splendour are such as "eye hath not seen," such as it profits not to attempt to realise in detail, it has certain inward characteristics negative and positive; and it is on these that our attention should be fixed.

And, first, it is a city in all the moral significance of that idea. A city is first the ambition and then the despair of man. The great lesson of this vision is that it remains the ideal of God. Babylon in all its incarnations, from the first on the Euphrates, through that set upon the Tiber, to those we know on the Seine or on the Thames, stands for the human instinct of fellowship and mutual co-operation, but also for the reiterated human experience that a great city is a great evil. In vain do we try to stem the steady tide of population setting from the country to town. In vain do we deplore the growth of these enormous communities. "Back to the land" is a kind of despairing watchword, for the simple reason that so few wish to go. The instinct of the race is against it. The city is the great loadstone; men are proud of a city; they name themselves by its

name; they sun themselves in its power and splendour. And yet in the hands of men the city has become a monster which devours its children. We hardly dare to look at the spoil-heaps of outworn humanity out of which its wealth has been extracted, at the misery and vice on the top of which most of its comfort and splendour rests. It contains great areas in which it would be a kind of torture for men of tender heart and refined feeling to be compelled to dwell. And all our effort, legislative, philanthropic, and religious, seems to fail piteously in the attempt to meet the evils inseparably connected with a great city. Man wrestles despairingly with the monster he has called into being. And God "prepares for them a city." Here is an amazing antinomy, and an eloquent one; an instinct practically universal, practically ineradicable; an experience of moral and social failure, repeated from age to age, from country to country, from one civilisation to another; a kind of cry from all who care for the best life of their fellow-men, "God help us to keep our cities small"; and yet the ideal life which God sets before us as the life of heaven is the life of a city, with streets, and walls, and gates, and "boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."

For the instinct to seek a common life, to form a complicated web of mutual sympathy and dependence, which is represented by a city, is

after all a true one, and the opportunity for its exercise essential alike to man's true happiness and to the full development of his powers. "It is not good for man to be alone"; neither is it good for a family to be alone, nor yet for a group of families; and this vision shows us "the far-off Divine event" as realised in the corporate life of humanity, in a society so vast that none of God's children is left out of it, and yet so compact that it can best be described as the society of those who dwell in one city.

The existence of such a society and its heavenly character are made possible by the other attributes of the city which is described by John, and, first, by those which may be called its negative attributes. Human thought and human language alike fail in the attempt to depict it as it is, but full success attends the effort to show what it is not. It is a city without pain, without darkness, without death. These great shadows, which throw their gruesome shapes across every city man has known, all the blacker for the sunshine of the happiness that edges them, these grim shadows are no more. "There shall be no night there," no waning of the power and glory of the day, no coming of that dark "wherein the beasts of the forest do creep forth," when—

"The searching eye of heaven is hid,  
And thieves and robbers range abroad unseen,  
In murder and in outrage."



But, in a sense yet more to be accounted of, there is no darkness falling on the human mind, no cold clutch of fear upon the heart round which the night of sorrow piles her shrouds, no ignorance, benumbing one set of faculties and galvanising another into the spurious activities of superstition and dread of the unseen. God is the light of that city, and every shadow of doubt, and ignorance, and fear has passed away.

There shall be "no pain." If only we knew some spot of earth, some island of the blest, of which it could be said, "There pain is impossible," how we should strain and struggle, not to get thither ourselves, but to send thither this one or that one whom we love. What competition there would be to be the sender, not the sent! And here is the place, not on earth, but beyond the narrow stream of death, where there is no pain, no grief, no heartbreak, no wounding of hearts made tender by their affection. If we knew of such a place we should say it was heaven; and here it is, and it *is* heaven, the place which Christ has gone to prepare for His own.

No night, no pain, and no death. If death be the covered way which leads to life like that, we feel almost as though we should miss it from the scheme of things. And when we do realise, as St. John helps us to do, what heaven is, we can

cry triumphantly, with St. Paul, "O death, where is thy sting?" We can sing with St. Francis, "Blessed be Thou, my Lord, for our dear sister, death." But, albeit death has lost its sting for those who "know whom they have believed," it remains a very bitter thing for those who are "left." So long as human hearts are bound up in the bundle of life together by ties of affection and love, so long as human lives lean upon one another for support and sympathy, so long must death remain an enemy of human happiness; and few indeed must be the hearts which do not respond, as with a great sigh of relief, to this promise. Whatever human ties are of such a character that they can be re-knit yonder, may be entered into here, and enjoyed without fear of "the abhorred shears." Man's last enemy is slain. Christ "hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light."

4 There are still two other features of this heavenly city which are also negative in character, but distinct from those which have gone before: there is no curse, and there is no temple. Ignorance, pain, and death have gone, because the curse, the cause of them, is finally lifted off from those who call this city home. For "curse" stands for sin in its effects on human life, for sin as clouding and perverting the knowledge of God, as sowing in man's constitution the seeds of

sickness and of pain, as introducing into human society the divisive forces of selfishness and cruelty, as giving to death its sting. Even the vision of the restored Jerusalem seen by Isaiah had to find a place for "sinners of a hundred years old," on whom even there a curse rested.\* But this heavenly city of the Apocalypse knows no more curse. The second chapter in our Bible shows us man before the curse fell ; this, the last chapter but one, shows us his condition when the curse has been utterly removed. And all that lies between shows us God at work—to remove the curse.

And while the curse still stood—indeed, so long as it stands—there was, and is, a temple in the city of God ; because, so long a temple is necessary. Sin has blighted the whole spiritual landscape as with a blast of fire. It has made man so blind to God's presence that it seems as though He were banished from the world of His own making. And even those who heard His voice, as though of One far off, and groped after Him in the darkness, seemed to grope in vain. And, not without Divine instigation, they made a temple, a place cut off and separate, wherein they might better realise His presence, and more clearly hear His voice. They were to make a tabernacle in the wilderness, a temple in the

\* Isa. lxxv. 20.

Holy City. They were to make a temple in their time, one day in seven cut off and consecrated to the service of God. They were to make a temple in their hearts, to have part at least of their life and hope walled in and consecrated, that it might not be trampled and polluted by the tumultuous herds of worldly thoughts and ambitions. They were to "sanctify the Lord God in their hearts."

And so long as men dwell here under the conditions of earthly life, they cannot do without these temples, the place, the time, the thoughts marked off for God, the place where we learn the secret of realising His presence in life, the time when we claim and proclaim His fellowship with ourselves, our fellowship with Him, the thoughts which, of set purpose, we direct toward the manifestation of His love in Christ, and of His will in duty. But there is no temple there; for the simple reason that none is needed. That which now has to be delimited from the world, and set apart for God—yes, and held with determination and force of will against invading hosts—has there expanded to cover the whole area of human experience and activity. God's presence has no longer to be sought; it is known; it is felt, universal and all-pervading as the light of day. "The tabernacle of God is with men." The direct and conscious service of God is not limited to any portion of time, of

life, or of thought; to be is to serve Him, and to live is to worship. Therefore, there is no temple there.

These words will soon be used, if they are not, in a sense, true already, of that famous Temple of Philæ in Upper Egypt. There it has stood for two millenniums and more, visited from generation to generation by men who came to worship the gods to whom they supposed that the fertility of Egypt was due. Now it is enisled and half submerged in the vast lake of Assouan, which secures the perennial flow of life-giving waters to the land below. So there is no temple in heaven, because that of which it was the symbol has taken its place. "The tabernacle of God is with men," and "the river of the water of life" flows through "the streets thereof."

Two other features mark the heavenly city, and they are of a positive kind. "His servants shall serve him." There is a distinction between the two words in the Greek, which is not readily reproduced in English. "His bond-servants shall render him the service of ministry." The inhabitants of the city "see his face," and serve Him with unclouded vision and with undivided love. This opens what is perhaps the most satisfying of all the avenues of vision into the heavenly state. It assures us, first of all, of continuance. Death

is not an end of the activities and energies which have been consecrated to God. It is not the great breaking off it seems to us who stand around, and see its work, but the setting free of old powers for new developments. If one looks back it seems the end of a career; if forward, it seems a career's beginning: in reality it is neither, but an incident of continuous life. Those qualities which we recognise to inhere particularly in the soul or spirit of man attend him to the world beyond. "He that has been righteous, shall be righteous still; he that has been holy, shall be holy still." And so with other qualities of man's inmost nature—love, justice, generosity, whatever he has had here, wherewith he can claim or offer to serve God—remains part of his personality, and finds its function in the life to come. Only to all such qualities and powers is now given a heightened efficiency. All the limitations disappear by which they have been cabined and confined; the physical limitations, weakness, sickness, want of vitality, which checked the energies of the soul; the social limitations, want of opportunity, hindrances arising from human relationship; the mental limitations resulting in mistakes, errors, misconceptions; and, above all, the spiritual limitations, the cramping, debilitating influence of sin and sinful habit; all these disappear:



“Fretless and free,  
Soul, clap thy pinion;  
Earth have dominion,  
Body, o’er thee!”

And thus the promise of the life to come involves not only continuity, but also completion. Stagnation is as incompatible with the life that is lived in the heavenly city as it is with true life here. To represent heaven as a place of rest merely is to present it as a place where men would be less truly men than before. Peace and fellowship with God do not exclude activity; rather must they stimulate it.

“I count that heaven itself  
Is only work to surer issues.”

Heaven means the bringing to maturity and perfection of those powers and energies which are only partially developed here. “His servants shall do him service”: in love without a grain of selfishness, in faith without a spasm of doubt, in knowledge without a shadow of uncertainty. All “those instincts immature,” all “those purposes unsure,” which we recognise in ourselves or have guessed in others, find their full development, their completion, when “that which is in part is done away.”

“What here is faithfully begun  
Shall be completed, not undone.”

And the same element in the vision gives us the final note of the heavenly life, Content. “They see his face.” They are satisfied. That may seem at first sight but a feeble presentation of the joy and the glories of life in heaven; but it contains, perhaps expresses, them all. To have a craving for love which only God can satisfy, and yet to be content; to have a desire for holiness not less than the holiness of God, and yet to be content; to have the infinite capacities of an eternal spirit set free from the trammels of earth and the body of earth, and yet to be content; to look back and see the meaning of it all; to look forward and know that time and change, grief and sin, are for ever left behind—is not that a heaven, one worth waiting for, one worth living for? “I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness,” said the Psalmist; and when we ponder his words, we see that human language can express no higher bliss: “I shall be satisfied.”

These, then, are the internal characteristics which mark the life of “the New Jerusalem.” No pain, no darkness, no death, no curse. Continuity and completion of all in man that is truly akin to God, and, therewith, content. Beside these, outward glories and splendours, however great, sink into insignificance. And these characterise the life of redeemed men who live in a city. By

that figure is disclosed their relation to one another. It is a common life of individuals, who retain their individuality, but are associated together by common interests for ends which they pursue in common. But there is yet another aspect of this common life. The Apostle's store of images is not yet exhausted. One remains, which sets forth the relation of the whole to God. This heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, is at the same time "the bride, the Lamb's wife." Here the great Christian idea of the Church in its absolute unity finds its culmination, we may say its transfiguration. The individual redeemed who compose the multitude that no man can number, who as dwellers in the city still preserve their individualities, are now regarded in their oneness in Christ, as forming but one body, one personality, and that personality is the Bride of Christ.

Far back in Hebrew history God had revealed His relation to His own people under figures drawn from human love and the bond of marriage. It was in this form that the great revelation centred itself which came to Hosea through the tragedy of his own home : "I will betroth thee unto me for ever: yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." \* Later prophets find

\* Hos. ii. 19.

in the same thought the deepest interpretation of the undeserved mercies of God. "Thy Maker is thine husband ; the Lord of hosts is his name." \* "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." † And here once more the place which in the Old Testament is occupied by God, is offered with entire simplicity and unconsciousness of any derogation to the Divine dignity, to the Lamb, Christ. The Church is *His* bride. Neither is this thought confined to St. John or to the Apocalypse. It was familiar to St. Paul, and the way he employs it shows that he could count on its being familiar to the Christians to whom he wrote. For he appeals to it as an acknowledged fact, from which he may deduce practical counsel for those who stand in the human relationship, its type. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church . . . that he might present it to himself a glorious church." ‡ This, which St. Paul calls "a great mystery," meaning a deep and wondrous thing now revealed, is what is presented to St. John in vision form. The ideal of human marriage is a type of the relation between Christ and His people in which both find perfect self-realisation, perfect satisfaction. And so St. John

\* Is. liv. 5.

† Is. lxii. 5 ; cf. Ezek. xvi. 6-16.

‡ Eph. v. 25-27.

beholds the consummation of redemption, the final completion of the work of Christ, in "the marriage supper of the Lamb," when He "presents to himself" the Church for which He gave Himself, and which He has sanctified and cleansed, "as a bride adorned for her husband."

## THE EPILOGUE

REV. xxii. 8-21

THE vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, the felicity of "just men made perfect," is the culminating point in the Revelation to and through John. When that has been described, nothing remains but to bring his book to a close, as he does in these last fourteen verses. Of necessity, these verses correspond to a musical *diminuendo*, down which the exalted ecstasy sinks rapidly to rest, reaching again the level of daily life, and daily waiting for the end.

"I John am he that heard and saw these things." In these words we hear again the note of personal experience which was struck in the first chapter, but also the notes of wonder that to him so great a privilege had been granted, and of assurance that, for all the wonder, it was true. Thus we detect subtle harmonies of mind with the declaration with which the first Epistle of John commences: "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you." The Apostle has "come to himself," and like David in Brown-



ing's poem, "can scarce dare believe in what marvels but now he took part." He remembers that, overwhelmed with the majesty and beauty of the things he saw, he flung himself at the feet of the angel who had showed them to him, only to receive new cause for wonder in the declaration that he and his collocutor are of equal standing in the sight of God. "I am no more than thou," says the angel in effect; "I, and thou, and thy brethren the prophets, and those who keep the words of this book, are all but fellow-servants." And so, "I John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation, and kingdom, and patience, that are in Christ, have learnt this, that I and you are fellow-servants with the angels. Above us there is only God."\*

From this point onwards the angel is silent; and it is the words of Christ Himself that the Apostle records. And we find in these words many echoes of what he has already heard from the same lips. It is as though he leant his ear from afar to that voice which was "as the voice of many waters," and caught now only the stronger

\* It is the opinion of Bousset (*Offenbarung*, p. 493) that, in the rejection by the angel of John's offer to worship him, we have the Apostle's protest, twice repeated (*cf.* xix. 10), against the worship of angels, which, not unknown in later Judaism, was beginning to invade the Christian Church, possibly along the channel of Jewish Christianity. Compare Col. ii. 18.

notes of its rhythmical beat. "Behold, I come quickly"; "I am Alpha and Omega"; "I am the root and offspring of David"; "He that is athirst, let him come"; "I come quickly." He seems to be recording not so much what he heard when the visions were ended, as the great key sentences of our Lord's communications to him, the words of Christ on which he built the fabric of his faith and the stronghold of his patience. But in the midst of these utterances, already familiar in his ear and ours, he hears the command: "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book"; and the reason is assigned, namely, that "the time is at hand." It is impossible not to feel that a contrast is here intended with the instructions given once and again to Daniel regarding *his* visions. "Thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end." "The vision is true; but shut thou up the vision, for it belongeth to many days to come."\* For Daniel the end was still many days and years away, and the closed record of his vision was to be kept as it were in proof of the Divine Providence which guided events to their destined issue: for John the end seemed very near, and the book of his vision was to be left open, that men might draw comfort and encouragement from its contents during the storms of judgment.

\* Dan. xii. 4; viii. 26; cf. xii. 9.

This immediately impending end gives also the explanation of the following verse: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; . . . he that is holy, let him be holy still." That is to say, the judgment is so near that men's characters, and so their destinies, are practically fixed; there is no longer fear of fleck or stain on the holiness of the holy, no longer hope of retrieval for those who have chosen to be unjust, impure. The "day of salvation" is passed; the choice is made, and the door is shut.

It may be that what St. John and the primitive Church as a whole anticipated as *the* end, proved, when it came, to be only *an* end; *the* end indeed for those on whom the judgment fell, but only one of the many stages by which the end draws near. And it would be unwise indeed were we to allow questions about what they thought, about the meaning of the end, or the form and date of its arrival, to distract our attention from the really important thing, namely, that, come the end how it may, in the crash of falling worlds, or with the whisper, "He is gone,"—this is what it means: he that is holy, shall remain holy; he that is impure, shall remain impure.

"Let such men rest  
Content with what they judged the best;  
Let the unjust usurp at will;  
The filthy shall be filthy still;

Miser, there waits the gold for thee!  
 Hater, indulge thine enmity!  
 And thou, whose heaven self-ordained  
 Was to enjoy earth unrestrained,  
 Do it.

Take thy world! Expend  
 Eternity upon its shows,  
 Flung to thee freely as a rose  
 Out of a summer's opulence  
 Over the Eden-barrier, whence  
 Thou art excluded. Knock in vain."

After all, heaven is not a place, though we needs must think of it as such; heaven is a condition localised. The condition is that of just men made perfect, that is, of men who have loved justice, have hungered and thirsted after righteousness, have been conscious of coming short, at every turn, of the righteousness of God, and now—are satisfied. It is the condition of men who have striven with all too imperfect success to keep their garments "unspotted from the world," and now "walk with Christ in white," beyond the reach of stain from selfishness or sin. The end—for them the hoped-for end—is the moment when the fruits of the Spirit in themselves are made perfect and made permanent.

Neither is hell a place, though we think of it as such. It also is a condition localised, the condition of having chosen evil and having the choice made permanent, sated lust compelled

to feed for ever on the ashes of dead passion, the Circe-rout of God-denying revelry fixed down as the unevadable routine of eternity.

Does even the picture of the New Jerusalem give a more soul-satisfying account of heaven than this? Does art or poetry, human eloquence or even the Word of God in any other place, give a picture of the condition of those who reject God so appalling as this? And given the condition, chosen by the two classes of men respectively, the issue is inevitable. "Myself am hell," if I have said to evil, "Be thou my god."

It may be doubted whether any man would consciously commit sin against himself or against his neighbour, if he did not have somewhere about him the idea that he could stop when he thought fit, that he knew when to draw the line, that he would be able to pull up before he had gone too far. And it is just this possibility of stopping, this prudential limitation, which is finally swept away by judgment when it comes. And that judgment falls on some one every hour. It falls on sin of every kind. The man who has chosen idleness will at last be unable to rise to any effort of labour; the selfish will grow in selfishness till the voices that call for his sympathy and help fail to reach his ear, and the man who has deliberately turned away from God will seek Him in the day of need, and find—nothing.

It is from such disastrous ending to life that God offers to men a way of escape in offering a means by which they may be delivered from sin in all its forms. There is One to whom the name of "Jesus" was given, because He should "save his people from their sins"; from these very tempers, dispositions, habits, which would make a hell of heaven itself for a man who had them. And even one who has shuddered at the near prospect of making final choice of evil, and prayed a prayer so near to hopelessness as this,

"Thou Love of God! Or, let me die,  
Or grant what shall seem heaven almost!  
Let me not know that all is lost,  
Though lost it be:  
Let that old life be mine—no more—  
With limitations as before,  
With darkness, hunger, toil, distress;  
Be all the earth a wilderness:  
Only let me go on, go on,  
Still hoping ever and anon  
To reach one eve the Better Land"—

even such an one may know a Saviour who comes and waits to save. And if John's vision of the certainty and awfulness of judgment does stir in us the sense of personal unfitness to share the life of heaven, it is to this Saviour that he sends us.

As we take our stand with John, straining eye and ear to catch the last fringes of the departing



vision and the last echoes of the heavenly voice, this is what, with him, we see and hear, the figure and the voice of Christ. The Book of Revelation has greatly served other great purposes. It has revealed as no other single book in the Bible that eternal background which gives their true meaning to events in space and time,—God “who created all things,” because of whose will they are and were created, the Lamb, “slain before the foundation of the world,” the symbol of that eternal love in God which of necessity becomes suffering when it passes under the shadow cast by human sin. It reveals the secular march of human history, as men, generations, peoples, ripen for judgment, and fall before its scythe; the even-handed justice of God, meting out retribution to the wicked, and salvation to His faithful ones; the flimsy character of the stoutest bulwarks and champions of evil, and the sure victory of righteousness and of God. All this has been set forth with a force of conviction and a wealth of illustration to which even Holy Scripture affords no parallel; and from all this God’s people in “Asia” were to draw fresh courage for the grim conflict in which they were engaged, and fresh hope to sustain them in the dark days of persecution.

It has been the primary object of the foregoing chapters to make clear the meaning and purpose

of the book, as a whole as well as in its parts, and that mainly by showing the connection between the parts and the contribution they severally make to the total impression. If the meaning of these parts, the links which connect them, and the relation in which they stand to one another, have been pointed out with any measure of success, it will not be necessary to have recourse to any of the modern theories of the composition of the Apocalypse. The history of these theories is extremely interesting, and the investigations on which they are based have greatly contributed to our understanding of the book; but, in so far as they seek to distinguish different documents and the work of different hands, in the book as it lies before us, it cannot be said that any one of them has succeeded in commending itself as probable. On the contrary, the impression gains ground that the book is from the hand of one man. The passages which have furnished many of the arguments in favour of a "documentary hypothesis," appear to be capable of a simple explanation, if we regard them as quotations made by the Apostle. And the probability of this is increased in the case of one who beyond question makes copious use of other documents, the prophetic books of the Old Testament. It would be only natural to suppose that the same man might make use also

of traditional material, cognate to his subject, which might be found in apocalyptic literature subsequent to the close of the Old Testament canon. We found the clearest case of this in the seventh chapter, where the Apostle appears first to quote a document of Jewish origin, and then, in the second half of the chapter, to build on that its Christian counterpart, in which we see both contrast and completion. We found the same again in the eleventh chapter, and a simple explanation of the difficult vision of the measuring of the Temple, and the two witnesses; and once more, in the twelfth chapter, where the vision of the woman, the child, and the dragon, which on any other hypothesis is full of difficulty, is incorporated as the basis and explanation of the vision of the monster by which it is followed.

Another thing which greatly helps to clear away the difficulties that have gathered round this book, is the recognition of the fact that it contains no chronology of the future. There are many sincere students of the Bible who have been repelled from the study, and even from the use, of the Apocalypse, by the foolish fashion of treating it as a kind of cryptogram, the solution of which would give dates and particulars concerning the end of the world. As we have seen, the attempt to treat it so is not only made in defiance of our Lord's plain warnings, but rests

on a misconception of the character of the figures and numerals used throughout the book. These numbers, whether applied to days, months, or years, are used in a purely conventional way, and describe not the duration of a period, but its character. In other words, what St. John saw was exactly what he says he saw—a vision, a picture. He saw it “in the flat.” Behind his picture of events in time there was never wanting the background of external realities; but what perspective the foreground had was very short; for St. John the very furthest event which he foresaw was very near. He gives us to see the principles on which the Divine process moves to judgment; but he does not give us any material by which it would be possible to reckon when the last hour will strike.

And the same consideration, that this is a record of things seen, a series of veritable vision-pictures, throws further light on that feature of the book to which reference has just been made, one which the hasty reader sometimes finds perplexing, namely, the repeated, one might almost say the regular, alternation of the scenes, from heaven to earth, and back to heaven. This is what John has seen, heaven behind the show of earth; and were we speaking of him as of an ordinary writer, we should say that this was his governing purpose, to set everything that hap-

pens, or is to happen, on earth, in the light of what already is, and always will be, in heaven. This is what gives his book at once its title, its meaning, and its value. It is the Apocalypse, the unveiling of those eternal facts which are hidden from us by the veil of sense, God in the heavenly temple, the Lamb slain, the Lamb victorious, the Son of man holding the Churches in His hand, the powers of evil already vanquished and cast out of heaven. And much of what is otherwise perplexing in the construction of the book, becomes plain when we recognise the nature of the writer's task, the difficulties that attend it, and his constant effort to hold events in time in close relation to the facts of eternity.

It is not suggested that the meaning of every detail is yet clear, or all the subtle links by which one part of the vision is connected with another; the book is full of symbolism which owed its meaning partly to ideas, partly to practices, many of which have long been forgotten. But here again a great deal is gained when we have recognised that all these symbols had a definite meaning for the writer's own time, and that most of them, if not all, had a history of their own. It would be difficult to point to any of these symbols which is certainly used for the first time; some of them have a history which can be traced back for many centuries. These are mainly such as

are of Jewish origin. For others, it is only as by the efforts of investigation in many different fields we are enabled to reconstruct the social and religious situation in Asia when this book was written, that some of them will yield up their full meaning. In this respect, as in others, much progress has been made in the last few years. The most recent discoveries of Professor Ramsay are likely to throw light on points which are still obscure, on the white stone, and the "mark of the beast," and the forms of persecution. The book and the monuments of the land for which it was first written are beginning reciprocally to illuminate one another, and every fresh discovery confirms the living relation between the two.

But we need not wait for perfect understanding of all the details, or even for a completely satisfactory history of its contents, in order to grasp its meaning and to feel its power. Whether we see behind the veil when lifted the tranquil securities of heaven or the confused and heroic struggles of earth, there stands ever as the centre figure, veiled or manifest, Christ. It is He through whom the Revelation comes; it is He who moves, seen only by the Apostle, in and out among the seven candlesticks; it is He who alone is found worthy to open the sealed Book of Judgment. From first to last His presence is felt, even when it is not expressly alluded to; what He has done,



what He has undergone, for men, is what can, and alone can, transfigure life. It is this which gives the Apocalypse its place at the close and climax of the New Testament, this which gives it its place in the heart of Christ's disciples. It describes as no other book does the glory of our ascended Lord, and the triumphant issue of His conflict with evil; the pictures which it draws of heaven and those that dwell there, of the new life where "there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain," commend themselves to the Christian heart not alone for their intrinsic beauty, but because Christ is so plainly set forth as the Lord of that life, and His sacrifice as the way by which men attain to it.

And, as the light of the setting sun lingers longest "on those dear hills where first he rose," so St. John dwells at the end of his book on what had first inspired him to write, the Person and Message of his Lord. That figure with which he held converse in the opening chapter, has in the interval expanded, as it were, so that all history and all heaven seem to be included in the revelation which comes through Him. And now the Seer's vision contracts again, to behold Christ alone. His interest, which has swept round the seven Churches, taking in their individuality, their danger, their opportunity, which has embraced the rise and fall of kings, the overthrow of

imperial tyranny, and the destruction of the forces of evil, contracts again, and focuses on one point—Jesus. Once more he hears his Master speak as in the old days in Galilee, “I, Jesus.” For John they are the same, the Lamb whose exalted glory shines on every page of his book, and Jesus, He that was once “of Nazareth.” And so, his hope, which has shot out to include “all nations and kindreds and tongues,” to lay hold on heaven itself, is now focussed as on one Person, so on one Event, Jesus and His coming. All is in Him; all hangs on that. All else is forgotten, the pains and anxieties of the Church on earth, the peace and felicity of the Church in heaven. The book goes out on a kind of fugue on the word, “Come.” “The Spirit and the Bride say, Come”; the Spirit searching the deep things of man and interpreting the unwritten yearnings of the race, saith, “Come”; the Bride, the Church of Christ, weary yet willing to wait, willing to wait yet weary, saith, “Come.” And he “that heareth and understandeth” all that is meant by the coming, saith, “Come.” And all together, the Spirit, the Church, and the men who have heard, unite to plead with the man who has not found the water of life, and with tender urgency bid him “Come,” and take freely, in order that having drunk from the well of salvation he may add his voice to their prayer. And the answer

falls: "Behold, I come quickly." "I go to prepare a place for you; and, if I go, I will come again, and take you to myself."

"He lifts me to the golden doors:  
The flashes come and go;  
All heaven bursts her starry floor  
And strews her lights below,  
And deepens on and up: the gate.  
Roll back, and far within  
For me the heavenly Bridegroom waits,  
To make me pure of sin."

Blessed are they who, after reading "the words of the book of this prophecy," can say, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."















